

Studies in Jonah 02 a Re commissioned Prophet

by James R. Cochrane

The sermon emphasizes the importance of obedience to the word of God and the consequences of disobedience, using the story of Jonah and Nineveh as an example of God's love and grace.

Duration: 42:21

Scripture: Jonah 3:1

Topics: "Evangelism", "Great Commission"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of the Great Commission and the need for evangelism in today's world. He compares the spiritual ignorance, darkness, superstition, and fear that exist in the world to the city of Nineveh that Jonah was called to preach to. The speaker highlights the love of God for the world, as demonstrated through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. He encourages believers to not just have knowledge and vocabulary about Christianity, but to truly grasp the love and heart of God. The sermon concludes with a reminder that it is not by human might or power, but by the Spirit of God that the mission of spreading the gospel is accomplished.

Transcript

Our reading, again, is found in Jonah, and as you look for that little book of prophecy, let me remind you of the little circle of listeners that we created yesterday morning in our imagination. They've heard about Jonah, his disobedience. He was thrown into the sea, and then they have heard the talk he composed of worship and praise to God while still in the inward parts of this great fish.

They must be wondering what was going to happen to Jonah, and the last verse of chapter two of Jonah reads as follows, And the Lord spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I did thee. So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh according to the word of the Lord.

Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey, and Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown. Again, it is our prayer that God will speak to us tonight from this portion of his word. I mentioned this morning that God does not always give a second opportunity.

I know many of us here this evening have left our youth behind. Any who might be young, it's good to remember that in the Scriptures there is no automatic guarantee of a second or third or fourth opportunity. The very opposite is true.

There are some key stories in which apparently the basic lesson is that God often does not give any further opportunity in the face of disobedience. There is a very fun story in the first book of Kings. It takes place around the beginning of the kingdom of Israel under Jeroboam I. He not only separated a great number of tribes from Jerusalem, but he also set up a competing system of religious worship.

They built another altar, and Jeroboam himself is present standing at the altar. When a man of God is sent from Judah, he comes by the word of the Lord, and he comes right up to King Jeroboam who stands by the altar, and he denounces the altar as being false, and that the judgment of God will eventually fall on him. He not only gives this message of condemnation in the very presence of the king, but he adds that there will be a sign from God, for the altar will break and the ashes will be scattered abroad.

As this man of God speaks in the presence of the king, King Jeroboam raises his arm and he says to his trusted men, take him. And then, when he tried to put down his arm, he could not move his arm, and he realized the presence and the judgment of God. And as he stood there by the altar with his arm outstretched, the altar broke, and the ashes were scattered everywhere.

Just having called on his men to take the man of God, now he turns to the man of God and he asks for his help and his prayers. And sure enough, God intervenes, and the king is able to put down his arm. And then he turns to the man whom he was about to destroy, and he invites him into the palace, into his home for a meal.

Now, notice very carefully that the man of God said, no, for the word of the Lord came to me and told me I must not eat or drink. And after I've given the message, I must not return by the same way. I must go back by a different way and promptly to Judah.

I cannot go. Even if you give me the half of your household, for the man of God, in obedience to the word of God, he turned and began to make his way back to Judah. Now, there was an old prophet who lived in Bethel, for this took place in Bethel.

And when he heard from his sons about the man of God who had come with such great power and authority and spoke against the king, the old prophet got on his donkey and went down the road to find him, and he found him under a great tree. And he said to the man of God, I would like you to come back to my home and be my guest. And again, the man of God answered, no, by the word of the Lord, I cannot go back.

I cannot stay. I cannot eat or drink. I must go by a different way right back to Judah.

Now, if you know the story, the old prophet lied to the man of God, and he said to him, no, for the Lord has spoken to me with a new message, and he's given permission for you to come back. And the man of God stood up and went back with the old prophet, no doubt into a very humble home, for a very plain meal. And as they sat there, the man of God might have thought about the invitation to eat with the king.

It would be like a banquet in comparison to the meager meal with the old prophet. But as they ate together, the word of the Lord really came to the old prophet and told him that the man of God, precisely because of his disobedience to the word of God, he would never be buried in the tombs of his fathers. The

old man, the old prophet, is somewhat disturbed.

He shares it with the man of God. They quickly finish their meal, and the old man gives him his donkey, and the man of God starts his way home. But a lion found him and killed him.

Most interesting to note is mentioned twice that the lion killed the man of God. It did not touch the body. That is, it did not eat the man, nor did it touch the donkey that stood there beside the lion.

And the people came by, and they saw the dead man of God and the lion and the donkey, and they wondered what had happened. And Yusuf, of course, came to the prophet. Eventually he went and brought the man of God back, and he buried him in his own tomb.

Now, I share the story with you for this reason. That man of God received a double message from God. First of all, to go before the king and denounce the author as being false and the coming judgment of God.

And if you read the story in 1 Kings 13, you'll find that the man came, and he did so with great authority, without any fear. We're talking about Jonah, who was being sent to Nineveh, a great and wicked city. This man of God was sent into the presence of Jeroboam I, who was a wicked man.

He made Israel to sin, and if he had his own way, he would have killed the man of God on the spot. But God intervened. The young man was a brave man, the man of God.

He gave the message with power and authority. But the other part of the message for him was for himself individually. It had to do with his personal allegiance to the Lord, and his personal obedience to the word of God, and that's where he failed.

A very solemn message for all of us who are preachers and teachers and elders and Sunday school teachers and witnesses for the Lord. How often we can stand up and denounce to others the word of God, but the key factor is if we take the word ourselves and put it into practice in our own life, there the man of God fails. And because of that disobedience to the word of God, he died before he ever got back to Judah, back to his family and those who served with him in the service of God.

God gave him no second opportunity. I take that story very literally and seriously. Never count on a second opportunity.

We have no right before God. We don't come and demand or claim. All that we have received, and all that we are, is by the free grace of God.

And if we abuse our opportunities and privileges, there is no guarantee of a second opportunity in the service of God. Now, why God gave to Jonah another opportunity? Take this into the mysteries of the sovereignty of God. There are a number of portions in the word of God where similar things happen.

Take the nation of Israel that sinned so grievously before God. You find that the Lord says in Hosea 14, these beautiful words, I will heal their backsliding. Jonah was a backslider.

He disobeyed the word of God. So was Israel as a nation. God says, I will heal their backsliding.

I will love them freely. And then he adds, for mine anger is turned away from him. In Spanish, it does not read, I will love them freely, but it says, de pura gracia, which means pure grace of God.

No explanation, no reasoning behind it that we know of. Just by the great grace of God, he forgives their backsliding and his anger turns away from them. Jonah disobeyed defiantly the word of God.

God's grace reached him, and in the grace of God, he was brought back to dry land and he was given a new opportunity. If you would like some words from the New Testament, remember all of us who are Christians tonight, something we must never forget. Paul says to us, yield yourselves unto God as those that are alive from the dead.

We ought to be dead. If we are alive spiritually today, it's again by the grace of God, and Paul says, now yield yourselves to God as those that are alive from the dead. That takes us back to our fundamental salvation.

We were dead in sin, we've been made alive. But when we look backward and think of so many failures and shortcomings, we really stand. We ought to serve God as those that are alive, and we really should have been dead.

In the grace of God, then, Jonah is given a second opportunity. Now, when you come to it, the second opportunity, please notice that right away you have a repetition of what God said to him the first time. I have a brother who, when he was in school many years ago, you may not do this in the United States of America, but in Canada, in years gone by, it was rather common a bright young boy or girl was sometimes allowed to skip a grade, and so you might be in grade two or three, and then you find yourself in grade five.

It's not always the best thing. I think my brother has some regret. There are certain basic things in life you miss when you don't go through the regular educational process, but let me share with you tonight that in the school of God you can't skip any courses, not once.

And here is a man who did not learn to obey the word of God. When the grace of God brings him back, gives him another opportunity, it doesn't teach him another lesson. Right back to the failure, and the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, Arise and go to Nineveh and denounce that city.

I have checked this out in the New Testament. This happens over and over again, and in the Old Testament also. Let's notice for a moment the story of Peter.

You remember how he denied the Lord? We all know that. Perhaps not all of us remember that in his denial, it was a double denial. He not only denied the Lord, he denied his fellow disciples.

Remember that for Peter said, or they said to Peter, Aren't thou also one of his disciples? He denied it and said, I am not. I don't belong to them. I'm not part of that group, nothing to do with them.

It is also true that one said to him, Did I not see thee in the garden with him? And there again he denied the Lord Jesus personally, but it was a double denial. He denied the Lord, and he denied those that belong to the Lord, his fellow disciples. Thus, after the crucifixion, when the Lord Jesus meets him, you remember what he said to Peter, Simon, lovest thou me more than those? And he said unto him, Yes, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.

Now, that's the reconciliation with the Lord whom he had denied. But the Lord Jesus turned to Peter, and he said unto him, Feed my lambs. You denied them too.

Now, Peter, you come back to me, and you assure me of your love. Now love them and care for them. Three times he is encouraged to feed the lambs, to feed the sheep, to care for the people of God, for he denied them when he denied the Lord.

And it was on the basis of that reconciliation which dealt with his problem, the double denial, that Peter became one of the great shepherds in the early church. As he served the people of God, he learned to love them, and to care for them, and to shepherd them. Probably he never forgot the moment when he denied the Lord, and he never forgot the moment when he denied his brethren, those who served with him as disciples of the Lord Jesus.

Mark, whom we have referred to sometimes called John Mark, if you remember his problem, after he returned home when Paul and Barnabas decided to go on a second missionary journey, they met together, and Barnabas wanted to take John Mark. And there was a great argument between them, a great, great argument. If any of you remember Harold Fingen, whom I never met, but about whom I've heard a great deal, and have one or two of the very few books he ever wrote, in his book on Mark, Dealing with John Mark, Harold Fingen notes that history gave the verdict to Barnabas.

That is, Barnabas was right. Mark was potentially a great servant of God. It's true that he failed at the beginning, and in connection with the failure, this was Paul's complaint.

He went not with us to the work. That's where he failed. He did not dedicate himself wholly to the work of God.

When Paul is now an old man, he writes these words, "'Take Mark and bring him with thee, for he is profitable to me for the ministry,' exactly where he failed. He proved himself later on, and Paul, who denounced him the first time, recognizes now he is profitable in the work or the ministry of God. Now, Jonah failed in connection with the word of God.

It came to him in fullness and in power with a specific message, and he said no. All that he went through, God in grace brought him back, but the message was the identical message, and God wanted to see the obedience which was missing in the first opportunity. Now, between the word of God and our obedience, there is a relationship that never ought to be broke.

Every time the word of God comes, there ought to be prompt and ready obedience to that word. Notice very carefully in Jonah chapter 3, the opening words, "'And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time,' and then verse 3, "'So Jonah arose and went unto Nineveh.'" The word of God, that's the revelation of God. That's God pouring out his heart to us, the word of God.

Now, that word of God does not stand in a vacuum in some far-off place. It's been brought right down to where we are. It came right down to Jonah.

I don't know how God spoke to Jonah. I don't know if it was in an audible voice or in a dream, how it was, but the word of the Lord came to Jonah. Now, when Jonah arose, there's the beginning of his response to God, and when he went to Nineveh, that is the full obedience to the word of God.

The lesson is so obvious it need not be labored tonight, but the word of God comes to us, not in a limited sense the way it came to Jonah. We hold in our hands the whole counsel of God, given to us by God in love and in sovereignty. One thing that God requires of us is that we stand up in reverence before his word, our response to the word of God, and that we go not in the sense of being a missionary overseas,

but the word of God is worked out in our lives.

We hear it, we know it, and we obey it day by day, not legalistically like the Pharisees, but the warmth and the fullness of the word of God is worked out in our lives by the way we think and talk and the things that we do. It fills our hearts. Paul talks that way about the word of Christ dwelling in you in fullness, abundantly, that word of God which fills our hearts.

Well, Jonah, he received the word of God the second time. He stood up and he went to Nineveh. Now, take verse 3 again, according to the word of the Lord.

I think that's very important. I don't want to take just little things and make them too big, but remember it was the word of the Lord that came to him, and all of his obedience that followed in the immediate verses down in this chapter, what he did was according to the word of God. By that, I think it was not a partial fulfillment of the word of God.

He stood up and he went right down to Nineveh, and all that he did was according to the word of the Lord. There is such a thing as partial obedience, of listening to the word and taking it in part, not in its fullness. That's a very beautiful phrase.

All that he did was according to the word of the Lord. That is, the word of the Lord guided him and filled him at the beginning of his ministry. Now, Jonah, in doing this, very sad to notice that of all God's creatures, man seems to be the most rebellious.

You see, you find that the great wind, it obeyed the Lord. The mighty tempest was under the control of God. The great fish did exactly what God said, swallowed Jonah, then it vomited him up on the beach.

Finally, at the end of the list, it's man who now obeys God and acts according to his word. That ought to cause a great deal of sorrow and shame in our hearts that the one who has created all things and placed man at the head of this world at the crowning glory of his creation, man is the last to obey the word of God. Jonah is much like Noah right at this particular moment, for when the word of God came to Noah, Noah by faith he built an ark, and the Bible says in Hebrew he was moved with fear.

The thought, again, is godly fear. Received the word of God with respect and reverence, acted in godly fear. He built the ark for the saving of his household, and he was a testimony to the world of righteousness and of condemnation.

He was moved by godly fear. Jonah was not moved the first time by godly fear, he was moved by selfish interest. He defied the word of God, now he is moved by godly fear.

I don't think we read into the story anything when we make the suggestion that all that he saw in that storm of the power of God brought into his heart, perhaps as never before, a reverence and a gnaw for God. You cannot put God off or put him aside, and now moved by fear, godly fear, he acts in accordance with the word of God. Now, to me as a missionary, and a missionary is not a special person, he's a man of like passion of all others of God's people, but notice in this story, for me this is one of the most beautiful things.

When you obey the word of God, you come very close to that which is nearest to the heart of God. Disobedience takes you away from God, from the things that are important to God. When you obey the word of God, then you get caught up in the passion of God, in the love of God, those things that God has very dear to his heart.

Now, notice what this chapter says, verse 2, "...arrived, going to Nineveh, that great city." Verse 3, the last part. Now, Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days' journey. Now, this phrase, an exceeding great city, is the translation of a superlative in the Hebrew language which is very difficult to translate in English.

It really means, great before God. You see, in English we talk about something that's great, something that is great, or something that is very great. I understand in the old Jewish communities, the greatest superlative of all was to describe something as great before God.

Now, that's the literal meaning of the word. Nineveh was great before God. Very difficult to understand in what way when you first hear the phrase.

You may remember that we who are men and women, we have great opinions about ourselves and the peoples of the world and the nations of the world, and we sometimes think we're very great. But back in the book of Isaiah, this question is raised, to whom then will ye liken God? And then the answer comes, this is only part of the answer, it is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers, small and insignificant before the greatness of God. And yet, this city Nineveh, so wicked, perverse, and filled with violence, was great before God.

Now, I want to notice with you that Nineveh was great in different ways. It was great in its time, great in its wickedness, and in its sin. But here's the suggestion I leave with you tonight.

This city of Nineveh was great before God because it was the object of his love. God loved the city of Nineveh. I don't think Judah loved the city of Nineveh.

I don't think Israel cared very much for Nineveh. Nineveh represented one of the powers that was directed against them. But God loved the city of Nineveh.

That may just be a foretaste in the Old Testament of the New Testament truth, God so loved the world that he gave its only begotten son. Mystery is beyond our comprehension, but God really loves us. He really loves the world.

And when I talk about us, I don't mean those of us gathered in part of the palms. I mean all the people that live in all parts of the world God loves, and he loved the people of Nineveh. And though it was a wicked and violent place, and it merited the judgment of God, that was the message that was sent, but that city was loved of God.

Don't let the message of judgment detract from the fact that God loves the whole world today. It's under the wrath of God. The judgment could fall at any time, but if it hasn't fallen, it's another testimony to the fact that God still loves, and he loves, and he loves, he loves to the uttermost, and his desire is to see the world run and brought back again to the Lord Jesus.

This great city of Nineveh, it was great before God. It was the object of his love, and when this man, Jonas, decided finally to obey the word of God, he got caught up in one of the great missionary stories of the Old Testament. And in his ministry, even though he rebelled again later on, he was the instrument in taking a message of judgment to a city that brought the city to its census, and the city became the object of the salvation of the Lord.

They were spared at that time the wrath that was about to fall on them. In conclusion tonight, think once more about Nineveh. I've made one or two suggestions.

It was a great city. The end of verse 3 says of three days journey. Very difficult to understand just what that means, because three days journey would be approximately the distance of 50 miles.

The Jews calculated a man could walk about 17 miles a day, so you're up around 50 miles. Nineveh is undoubtedly one of the greatest, the greatest city in the world at that particular time. Even the ruins that the archaeologists have found are rather astounding.

It was a large city, but it was not 50 miles across. That would be an extremely large city, and the only possible suggestion was that at that particular time there was an administrative center in that part of the kingdom. Nineveh was the key city, but there were two smaller adjoining cities, and across that triangle there was the distance of approximately 50 miles.

In other words, it was the very center of the world that long ago. It was great in science, but it was also great in population. 120,000 people lived in the city of Nineveh, but it was great in its need.

There's a very tender phrase in the last verse of the prophecy of Jonah where you read about the six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand. That speaks of their need. They were not Jewish people.

They had not received the law of God. They knew nothing about the sacrifices. They knew nothing about the promises of a coming savior.

Spiritually, they were ignorant people in tremendous need. So, the city is great in size, it's great in population, but especially it is great in need. And I can't miss the point tonight.

We live in a great world as far as size is concerned. Don't forget that the great commission of the Lord Jesus is just as true and vital and necessary today as it was 2,000 years ago, if for no other reason than the reason that the population of the world today has never before been as great as it is today. That is, the need is great, and the world that we live in spiritually is an ignorant world in darkness, in superstition, and in fear.

Now, Jonah loved Nineveh, and I don't have to remind you tonight that God loves the world that we live in. I want to quote the verse again, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. Those of us who are Christians and now belong to the Christian community, you often hear in our communion services, he spared not his own son, but delivered him up for a song.

Many remember the words in 1 John, the Father sent the Son to be the Savior of the world. The more you read through the whole Bible, and especially the New Testament, you find God's great interest in the world. He loves the world.

The world that you read about in the newspaper that's filled with crime and hate and corruption, all of the awful things that happen in our world. God doesn't love the sin, but he loves the people of the world, and we must love the way God loves. And as the Father sent the Son, it was the Lord Jesus who said to us, as the Father has sent me, even so send I you.

And I remember listening to John Stott many years ago as he spoke to us at the World Congress on Evangelism, that great Bible scholar from the Anglican Church in England, the Church of England. And speaking on that verse, he asked the question, how did the Father send the Son? He sent him right down into the world. Now, the Lord Jesus said, as the Father has sent me, even so send I you, not to live in isolation, not to forget the world that's outside, but to love that world.

And as we come into contact with it to witness for the Lord Jesus, the Lord Jesus actually lived in the world and walked with people. Well, as my Father has sent me, he said, even so send I you. Not to live in a monastery, but to rub shoulders with the people of the world, not to be contaminated with them, but to witness to them to the truth of the gospel.

And above all, the Lord Jesus, to accomplish that mission, he was sent to the place called Calvary, where he gave his life and he died for the world. Not many of us are called upon to die, but as the Father has sent me, the Lord Jesus said, even so send I you. And many of you know of sacrificial service for God of many people.

We saw in that film the other night a man in spite of poor health who for long years, against all odds, served God faithfully, and apparently still is in his work of translation, for he loves the way God loves. Now Jonah, and we're not going to get to the end of the book of Jonah, Jonah never learned to love that way. When he saw the love of God come down on that great city in forgiveness and in restoration, he was very upset and he murmured against God.

And it seems to be that the whole point of the story of Jonah is that not all of those of us who serve the Lord share the outlook of the Lord. Not all of us who talk about the love of God really know the way God loves, nor do we love in that way. Not all of us who talk about the great price that the Lord Jesus gave when he bought our salvation know what it is to serve and sacrifice to the Lord Jesus.

It's so easy, like Jonah, to be a professional prophet, to know all the terms and the vocabulary, but not to grasp the love and the heart of God. And this man Jonah, though he obeys at the beginning of chapter three before the end of chapter four, he is again complaining against God and he is out of step with God. One verse then, as we leave our service this evening, remember that God said through his prophet so long ago, not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.

The reason I leave the verse with you, there are so many Jonas around the world today, and many of them are missionaries. When I left Vancouver in 1947 to go to the Dominican Republic in the great mercy of God, before I ever reached the Dominican Republic, and the stories are a secret that I never intend to share with anyone. Before I ever reached the Dominican Republic, God disillusioned me about missionaries, for I built such a great concept in my mind of those who were almost superhuman in their holiness and saintliness and service for God.

If I'd never learned the lesson, I don't think I would have ever survived 30 years in the Dominican Republic. Most missionaries, in some way or other, are very much like Jonah. We have our downfalls, our problems, our failures.

But if that great city of Nineveh, in that generation, was one to God, it wasn't through the eloquence of this man Jonah. It wasn't because of his faithfulness. It wasn't because of any of his natural resources.

This is the principle, not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts. And I know today around the world there are many men and women, missionaries and national Christians, who've had their testimony like Jonah. But God is working through them.

God did not work through Jonah because he was a great, great man. He was a man of life passion, as most men and women God worked through him through grace and in the power of his spirit. And if you read in Romans about a national conversion, all Israel shall be saved.

And if you know about personal conversion, you may remember this is the only municipal conversion we know of in the Bible. A whole municipality, a whole city, from the king right down to the most humble person in the city, they turned to God. The whole city was brought back to God, not through the greatness of Jonah, but through the power of God.

For Paul is right. We are earthen vessels that the excellency of the power may be of God and not of us. Please take in your hymn book this evening, and as we conclude our service, we will sing hymn number 596.

Go labor on, spend and be spent, thy joy to do the Father's will. It is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still. Hymn number 596.

Shall we stand to sing this closing hymn? Go labor on, spend and be spent, thy joy to do the Father's will. It is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still. Hymn number 596.

Shall we stand to sing this closing hymn? Go labor on, spend and be spent, thy joy to do the Father's will. It is the way the Master went, should not the servant tread it still. Hymn number 596.

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