

# **Jonah**

**The Reluctant Prophet**

**by**

**Jim Waterworth**

Talks given on

“Discovery”

A programme of GBS Radio

(The Gospel Broadcasting System Ltd.)

# Contents

## Study

- 1 Introduction
- 2 The Call of God
- 3 The Man Who Ran Away
- 4 He Found a Ship
- 5 Jonah Ran Away
- 6 The Storm
- 7 Storm Damage
- 8 The Sleeping Church
- 9 Jonah as a Picture of Christ
- 10 Jonah's Prayer
- 11 The Great Commission
- 12 Compassion

Scripture quotations are from  
The New International Version ©

Published 1999 by GBS Radio ©

## Introduction

The prophet Jonah is often criticised because he was disobedient to God's command that he should go and preach against the wicked city Nineveh. However, there are certain things about him that we should remember. We should remember his prayer in the depths of the sea after he was thrown out of the ship in which he was running away. We should remember his honesty when he confessed to the ship's crew that the violent storm they were in was his fault. We should remember his self-sacrifice in choosing to die for others if that were necessary.

So what can we discover about this man Jonah from the Old Testament book that tells his story? What do we know about him? When Israel was divided into two kingdoms after the death of King Solomon, an evil king, Jeroboam, ruled the ten tribes in the northern kingdom. This northern kingdom was eventually taken into captivity by the kingdom of Assyria. Jonah lived in the period between Jeroboam's revolt and this captivity. He lived at the same time as Elisha and both prophesied in Israel, in the kingdom of Samaria. All this was about eight hundred years before Christ.

We have a glimpse of Jonah's life and ministry in the Second Book of Kings and chapter fourteen. What sort of time was it in which Jonah lived? It was a time of bad leadership and a time of sin. We read in 2 Kings 14 verse 24 concerning King Jeroboam the second: "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit". We know from the following verses that all of this led to suffering and oppression and bitter affliction for everyone.

Jonah might have been given a scathing message of judgement and denunciation, but he tells them in verses 26 and 27 of 2 Kings 24 that God had seen them in their need and had spoken to them when they were oppressed and had actually delivered them from nations that would have destroyed them. The Lord had done this because He was not going to blot out the name of Israel from under heaven. He even used the wicked king Jeroboam to save them. So Jonah lived in a time when the people no longer worshipped the true God and they no longer obeyed His commands. The Word of God was no longer precious to them. The inevitable result of this was misery, isolation and oppression. They were deprived of God's blessings, they were lost and utterly without hope. It is summed up in verse 26, "There was no one to help them".

Isn't that a picture of the people in our day? Humanly speaking there is no one to help them. There is no one who can deliver them from the power of sin. Jonah, in his day, had a message of grace from the Lord. God was even using an evil king to achieve His purposes for His people, despite their wickedness. Clearly Jonah knew something of the extraordinary patience of God and it amazed him and perhaps perplexed him.

This little snapshot of the life of Jonah is actually the key to his perception of things as it's recorded at the beginning of chapter 4. Here we see that he is angry when God spares the wicked city of Nineveh. Jonah probably expected to live out his days in his own land. The Israelites were an exclusive people, everything about them created a dividing wall between them and the other nations. Of course Israel was to be separate from the Gentiles for a specific time and purpose. They were called by God to be the custodians or guardians of the grace that the Gentiles would inherit in due time. They should never have forgotten that the covenant that God made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob also embraced the Gentile world. God had said to Abraham, "I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed. The very name Abraham means "father of many nations."

During the Old Testament period there were the few like Isaiah the prophet who saw the universal grace of God involving all the nations. The Psalmist David caught the same vision when he says in Psalm 2, "Ask of me and I will make the nations your inheritance, and the ends of the earth your possession." Did you know that the very central chapter of the whole Bible is Psalm 117 and here we read, "O praise the Lord all you nations, extol Him all you peoples. For great is His love towards us, and the faithfulness of the Lord endures for ever."

The Jewish nation was chosen by God for His special blessing. Through them he would fulfil His purposes for the salvation of all men, but they saw God as their own exclusive God and had a very narrow understanding of His love for the whole world. Jonah shared that view and the Lord had to show him how wrong he was. Even today there are those who have this same narrow view of God's grace and don't realise that they should have a great vision and compassion for the lost all over the world. Before his conversion the apostle Paul said that this was his attitude and he hated and even persecuted those Gentiles who had come to know Jesus Christ as their Saviour.

Israel were so privileged, they knew the living God; God had revealed Himself to them; they had the Holy Scriptures; they had the promise of a coming Messiah. They knew more than any other nation that God Who is utterly holy can only be approached on the basis of sacrifice and in His appointed way. They should have walked humbly before their God in true penitence and worship and not tried to rely on their own righteousness.

Now all of this background is very important if we are to understand the book of Jonah in its historical setting. Jonah was sent to a Gentile city, the capital of Assyria, Nineveh. Jonah was the only prophet ever given such a mission. His was an extraordinary call and it is a prophetic glimpse of how God would in His time and purposes reach out to all nations in a great missionary movement. Even Peter, when he became a follower of Christ, did not understand that Gentiles were to be included in God's great plan of salvation. It took an unusual vision from God, recorded in Acts chapter 10, to make him understand this. This is what Simeon described as he took the infant Jesus in his arms and said, "My eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light of revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel." You will find that in Luke chapter 2 verses 30 to 32.

Jonah's call was a glorious moment for Israel and it was a call of revelation to the city of Nineveh. Jonah was to bring the light of God's word to that city, to warn them of God's justice but also to tell of God's mercy. His message was not comfortable or easy or popular. It was a very disturbing message. The truth about the human condition in the sight of God is also very disturbing. Nineveh was a wicked city and stood condemned by God, facing His judgement, but Jonah was sent with a message of hope if only they would listen. It is the same today.

The Lord Jesus says to His servants today, just as He said to Jonah, "Go to the great city and preach against its wickedness". This was because God wanted the people of Nineveh to repent of their wickedness and seek His forgiveness. The Scriptures tell us that "God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." But the people must hear the message for "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God".

If you are a Christian you are called to take the good news of your Saviour to your family, your neighbours and friends. Perhaps He may call you to take it to a foreign city, just as He did with Jonah. Do not be reluctant, as Jonah was, to take the message because it is for all people. Have a heart of compassion for those who are lost among the nations of the world.

If you are not a Christian then the Living God calls you turn to Him, repenting of your sin and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour. The One Who Himself has borne the punishment for your sins and mine so that we need not fear the judgement of God.

## The Call of God

I have called this study "The Call of God", and we are going to look at Jonah chapter one and the first two verses. This is what they say: "The word of the Lord came to Jonah son of Amittai: Go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against it, because its wickedness has come, up before me." As we begin this study it is interesting to note that the name Jonah means "A dove". The dove symbolises a number of things in the Scriptures. It was a dove that symbolised the anointing of the Lord Jesus by the Holy Spirit at the commencement of His ministry.

A dove also speaks of sacrifice and purity and peace. So this is a significant name for someone who is to be called by God. It is perhaps also significant that Jonah's father was called Amittai, which means "My truth", because all of God's prophets were to be sons of the truth as they proclaimed the message of the Lord.

So we read in verse 1 that "The word of the Lord came to Jonah." The commission that God was about to give to Jonah was a serious and sacred trust. The word that came to Jonah was to be obeyed and proclaimed and he was God's chosen vessel to take the message to the city of Nineveh. Before this he had prophesied during the reign of the wicked king Jeroboam as we discovered last time. We know very little about Jonah but the Lord chose him and gave him an important mission. If you are a Christian, God has chosen you and He has a work for you to do where you are.

This commission given to Jonah was a serious and sacred trust. We learn from verse 2 that the command given to him was a sovereign command. It was the King of all creation Who commissioned him. No details are given, no further explanation, no predictions concerning the results of Jonah's preaching. The great prophet Isaiah was told by the Lord that his ministry would be barren, but Jonah is simply told to go and preach against the wickedness of Nineveh.

The call or commission of God is different for everyone. Isaiah saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted. He heard the seraphim calling to one another about the Lord Almighty, the Holy One. He heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And he said, "Here I am. Send me." (Isaiah 6) And he received his commission, "Go and tell this people." Jeremiah, the young prophet heard the reassuring voice of the Lord telling him that even before he was born he had been set apart and appointed as a prophet to the nations (Jeremiah 1).

But Jonah's commissioning was so different, we read simply that the word of the Lord came to him and he was told to go. God deals with us all so differently. Your conversion experience was different to mine and we should not question another's experience of the Lord because it differs in some way to our own. The Lord's call to individuals to serve Him comes in many different ways. Abraham was told to leave his home country and go where the Lord directed him. David the future king was chosen while still a young boy by Samuel

the man of God. We can trust in the character of God to call as He chooses and as He knows best.

In verse 2 of Jonah chapter 1 we learn something about the message that Jonah was commissioned to preach. It was to be about sin and righteousness and judgement to come. The Lord said that the wickedness of the city had come up before Him. When he eventually went to Nineveh, Jonah's words were words of warning that in forty days the great city would be overturned. Everyone, from the king down knew what this message meant. They recognised their evil ways and their violence and that they were facing the judgement of God who is holy. Is not this the work of the Holy Spirit today? The Lord Jesus Christ said this in John 16 verses 8 to 11: "When He (the Spirit) comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement; in regard to sin, because men do not believe in me; in regard to righteousness, because I am going to the Father, where you can see me no longer; and in regard to judgement, because the prince of this world now stands condemned."

True preaching is very disturbing at times. When Peter preached on the Day of Pentecost we read in Acts chapter 2 verse 37: "When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" Faithful evangelism will expose sin and bring conviction to the hearers as the Holy Spirit does His work. The true gospel of Jesus Christ makes people uncomfortable it does not entertain them. The preaching of the cross is foolishness to those who do not believe, said Paul, but to those who believe it is the power of God for salvation. The cross of the Lord Jesus shows us both holiness and the righteousness of God, that sin must be dealt with and judged. The cross shows us the love of God for sinners, because it was there that the Son of God took on Himself the judgement due to us. There can be no substitute for the faithful preaching of the cross, for the telling out of the message that Jonah was given so that sinners will turn to God for mercy and forgiveness.

We learn from this that preaching is very important. It is a serious and sacred trust. Paul writes to his son in the faith Timothy and says, in 1 Timothy 4 verse 13: "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching." Those great men of God, Enoch and Noah, were both preachers in their day. All the great prophets were preachers pointing out the spiritual needs of the people. Jonah's preaching was supremely concerned with the wickedness of the people of Nineveh which had offended God. In that sense he was very like John the Baptist who preached repentance and baptised those who turned from their sin and looked for the coming Saviour. The real problem in the lives of people today is their sin, their rebellion against God. This is the reality of what we see around us. Sin and death and judgement to come are all realities and as Christians we are called by God to warn our families, our friends and our neighbours and to bring them the good news of the Lord Jesus.

The call of Jonah is our call who are members of the church of Jesus Christ. You may not be called to preach publicly. You may never go beyond the bounds of your village or town or city. But you are called to be a witness for Christ, to be a watchman warning the people and calling them to safety in the Saviour. We are to be like Abraham, the man who pleaded in prayer for wicked Sodom.

Jonah's commission reminds us, too, of the long-suffering and the patience of Almighty God. Nineveh had a long day of grace that they had utterly abused and now God was even sending his prophet to warn them to repent. God has been long-suffering and patient with many of us. As you read this message do you need to repent of your sins that have grieved a loving God? Ask Him to forgive you and to wash you and to make you His child. Do you as a Christian need the touch of God upon your life, to go through a real, deep repentance yourself and then go and preach this message to others in a gracious and humble spirit?

May the call of Jonah become our call as we hear the voice of God in His Word.

## The Man Who Ran Away

We continue to discover together the lessons to be learned from the book of Jonah in the Old Testament of the Bible. I've called this talk "The Man Who Ran Away". We read in verse 3 of Jonah chapter 1, "But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish." We discovered last time that God had commissioned Jonah to go and preach to the wicked city of Nineveh, but "He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for Tarshish. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for that port to flee from the Lord." Jonah had been told by God to go five hundred miles to the east, instead he headed for Tarshish in Spain which was in the opposite direction.

Now Jonah knew very well that he could not really hide from God or go where God would not see him or know where he was. We see this in verse 9 where he says: "I worship the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." Jonah knew in his heart that wherever he went he could not flee from God's presence. David makes this same point in Psalm 139 verses 7 to 12. Verses 7 and 8 say this: "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there." Friend, do not think that you can hide from the Lord for He is omnipresent, that is, He is everywhere. And because what you do is not seen by others do not be deceived into thinking that God does not see. God saw what Jonah was doing as he boarded that ship to go to Tarshish.

So what does it mean then that "Jonah ran away from the Lord"? In Genesis chapter 4 we read concerning Cain, after he had murdered his brother Abel and had been seen by God, that "He went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, or wandering, on the east of Eden." Cain was distressed and said to the Lord, "I will be hidden from your presence." This was the sense in which Jonah tried to run from the presence of God. As long as he was in Israel he would be continually faced with the word of God that he must go to Nineveh. Imagine the inner conflict that Jonah would have to face every day that he resisted that commission. Unlike Cain, who wanted to remain in God's presence, but was banished because of what he had done, Jonah, who knew the presence of the Lord, wanted to get away because he did not want to obey God's word to him. He prefers to go to an alien culture, wherever it may be, in some pagan society far away; away from all the blessings and comforts of home to endure the heartaches and hardships of exile; he would prefer to do all that than face up to the reality of God and His call.

Jonah's attempt to run away from the presence of the Lord is a sad picture of those who are Christians but who are not prepared to obey the word of the Lord. It is a picture of those who have the opportunity to serve the Lord but they turn away and backslide. They have a controversy with God as Jonah did. The way of the backslider is a hard way. He has known the joy of the Lord, the sweetness of the fellowship of the Holy Spirit and the comfort of the Scriptures, but now all that has gone and there is an emptiness in the soul. As Jonah made his way to the port of Joppa it must have been with a sense of banishment. Is this your situation? Have you resisted the word of the Lord to you in some way? Have you tried to get

away from the promptings of the Holy Spirit? If so, turn back to the Lord right now and seek his forgiveness and He will abundantly pardon you and restore you. Obey his command to you and you will again know His presence with you.

All this leads us to ask another question. Why was the commission of Jonah so painful and so unacceptable? There are two basic reasons and we have them in verse 2 of Jonah chapter 1. First, Nineveh's greatness and second, Nineveh's wickedness. The greatness of this city is referred to at least three times in the book of Jonah. One historian, writing in the nineteenth century, said "Such a city none has ever built since. There is probably not on record an account of such a city. It had large gardens and even fields within its walls." We read in Jonah chapter 3 verse 3: "Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go all through it." So how could a mere man stand alone in that vast place and preach against it?

From a human standpoint the task was hopeless and absurd! How could he communicate with people like the Ninevites by just preaching about their hopeless, lost condition and about the holiness of God? But how did Peter see people repenting of their sins in the great city of Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost? Or how did Paul see conversions in Athens and later in Rome? All these cities were great in religion and culture and power, but great spiritual need calls for great compassion. The Lord Jesus Christ wept over a city. We read that Paul was greatly distressed to see the city of Athens given over to the worship of idols. The people of these great cities were all challenged by the preaching of the gospel. They were convicted by the presentation of God's word that warned them of judgement to come, but also told them of the grace and mercy of God towards those who would repent.

Jonah was commissioned long before the time of Christ, long before the birth of the church at Pentecost, but he did not want to take this message to Nineveh. May we who are Christians, who have been commissioned by the Lord Jesus to "Go into all the world and preach the gospel", not be afraid or unwilling to take this message of salvation to a lost and dying world. It is the simple, faithful preaching of the cross of Christ that is the power of God for salvation to those who believe. Let us not be daunted by the size of the task, but rather let us play our part in obeying the commission in the place where the Lord has put us.

The second reason for Jonah's wanting to run away was the wickedness of the city of Nineveh. It was a place full of idolatry and immorality. It was a very corrupt society known for their extreme cruelty. It was known in the nations around it for its evil character. One hundred and fifty years later Nathan the prophet described the final destruction of this city which its repentance in Jonah's day had postponed. The closing words of Nathan's prophecy sum up the situation for us. He says, "Nothing can heal your wounds, your injury is fatal. Everyone who hears the news about you, claps his hands at your fall, for who has not felt your endless cruelty." You will find a graphic description of this wicked city and its final judgement in the prophecy of Nahum.

Was this, then, that caused Jonah's heart to faint as he considered not only the greatness of Nineveh but also its awful reputation? Was it that he felt that these wicked people did not deserve the chance to turn from their evil ways and seek the mercy of God? No doubt he felt very inadequate for the task the Lord had called him to do. Perhaps you feel in adequate to fulfil the commission that God has given to you. We are, all of us, in our own strength, unequal to the task. But the Psalmist reminds us, "I am still confident of this: I will

see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord."

Are you ever tempted to run away from God's will for your life? The task is so great, the workers are few. Are you perhaps running away from a full surrender to the Lord Jesus? Are you fully serving Him, even in the small things? Are you faithfully serving the One Who died for you on the cross? O may the Lord help us to be obedient and faithful to our blessed Saviour. May we not run away as Jonah did from the privilege of being God's messengers to a world that needs to hear His word.

## He Found a Ship

This time we are looking at chapter 1 and verse 3 where we read: "But Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord."

In this verse we have, I believe, a picture of the situation in the life of a Christian that is called "backsliding." This means to fall away, or to go back into the world. In this action of Jonah we find the steps of disobedience that are often followed by those who turn their back on God. Note first his sheer determination. The first step of disobedience, of backsliding, is that of running away. Those who do this, as Jonah did, soon find that our God is an inescapable God. You cannot outrun either the love or the justice of the Lord.

Sometimes it happens like this: here is a born again child of God, but things have gone wrong. His prayer-life has become stale and wearisome and has reached the point where it has vanished altogether. He is too busy to read his Bible and somehow he can't always make it to church. He begins to find all kinds of faults and flaws in other Christians and he begins to slide away. What has happened? He has lost his first love and he has forgotten the pit of sin from which he was rescued. He has forgotten the cross of Calvary and the One who died for him there. Like the prodigal son in the Lord's parable, he is headed for the far country thinking that life will be better there. There is a solemn word from the Lord Jesus about this situation. He says in Luke 9 verse 62: "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."

If a man runs, he must run somewhere. Jonah ran to the port of Joppa, or Jaffa as it is now known. Here he was on the very borders of Israel, but he could still move back into the will of God. Every ship in that port presented Jonah with a conscious choice. The choice he makes now is of momentous importance for it will affect so many lives. Little did he think that all that happened would be recorded in the Scriptures and be read by us almost three thousand years later. How necessary it is for us to realise the importance of our decisions where God's will for us is concerned and to recognise the impact of those decisions on others.

Let's consider for a moment what causes a believer to backslide. What is it that makes a Christian seek to run away from the Lord? It is not necessarily some great spiritual battle such as Jonah faced. It can simply be tiredness. The wife of Thomas Manton, a Christian of a former generation, wrote: "Weariness makes way for wandering." It is not easy to pray when you are tired or unwell, so you must be on your guard when this happens. It is at such times that the Lord Jesus says to us, "Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest." Do not use tiredness or weariness as an excuse to neglect your prayer-life, but rather use it as a reason to seek the Lord for His strength and rest.

Another cause of backsliding is isolation. Another older writer called George Swinnock says: "Satan watches for those vessels that sail without a convoy." During the last World War

supply ships crossing the great oceans did so in large groups or convoys escorted by naval vessels. They did this because there was greater safety in numbers. A single ship, sailing on its own, was in grave danger from the enemy. In the New Testament Christians are described as "saints". This word never occurs in the singular, always in the plural. The church of the Lord Jesus is a body and we are to seek out and enjoy Christian fellowship and the mutual encouragement and help that comes from this. We cannot "go it alone", as believers we need one another. If you are an isolated believer and there is no one else in your family or where you live, then it is vital that you stay close to the Lord through prayer and the Scriptures and through broadcasts such as this. If possible, find other believers with whom you can meet from time to time so that you will not feel alone. If this is not possible, then remember that our Saviour has promised His continual presence with you.

Another cause of backsliding is pride. Thomas Brooks wrote that "Satan has his devices to destroy the learned and the wise." In other words the adversary of God's people sometimes causes them to think more highly of themselves than they should. They pride themselves in their abilities and look down on those who are not so gifted, although they often excel them in grace and holiness. Paul said that "knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." All that we possess by way of our abilities is a gift from God to be used for His glory and not our own.

It is all too possible for us to come to rely on our own abilities and lose our trust in God alone and so fall away.

We are discovering some causes for Christians falling away from the Lord, or perhaps like Jonah trying to hide from Him. One of Satan's strongest devices for turning believers away is discouragement. You may be discouraged by the actions of another Christian, or it may be that you have worked long and hard in the service of the Lord and it all seems to be in vain. When the Lord Jesus told His parable of the persistent widow in Luke chapter 18, the fundamental message of that parable was that we should not lose heart. The apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15 verse 58: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain." The same apostle says in Galatians 6 verse 9: "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."

Backsliding can also be the result of doubt. When you are tempted to doubt by the enemy of souls, you should remind him of certain facts. Remind him that your God and Saviour is the Creator of all things. Remind him that Christ really did come into this world to save sinners by His death on the cross and that He rose again in victory on the third day. The very existence of the Christian church down the centuries, how God has kept it through times of persecution and opposition, and how through its message countless lives have been changed, bears witness to the truth.

Another cause of backsliding is secret sin. We should remember that nothing is hidden from Almighty God. Sin breaks our fellowship with Him and secret sins especially will destroy our devotional life. The Psalmist says in Psalm 66 verse 18: "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened ...". Sin cannot be hidden from the Lord and if it is not confessed it will destroy our joy in the Lord and ruin our testimony. We must not minimise sin for all sin is grievous to God and will break our fellowship with Him. When we no longer enjoy the presence of the Lord, then we are in danger of backsliding.

So Jonah found a ship waiting in the harbour to take him away in the opposite direction to the will of God. For us today there are many ships waiting as it were to move us out of God's will. That voyage proved to be for Jonah the most tragic and traumatic and dangerous experience that he would ever have. It almost cost him his life and he had to go through the most harrowing experience that any one of us could imagine. There is a terrible price to be paid by those who consciously and wilfully move out of the will of God. My prayer for you today, listening friend, is that you will remain close to your Saviour and ever desire to be in His perfect will. Do not, like Jonah, look for a way out of God's presence, but rather hear His word to you and obey it.

## Jonah Ran Away

We are looking again at the first chapter of the Book of the prophet Jonah as we continue to discover the practical lessons to be learned from this interesting and challenging Old Testament book. I've called this talk "Jonah Ran Away." Let me remind you that in the opening verses of this book we read about God's command to Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and preach against its wickedness. But this is what we read in verse 3: "Jonah ran away from the Lord and headed for Tarshish. He went down to Joppa, where he found a ship bound for that port. After paying the fare, he went aboard and sailed for Tarshish to flee from the Lord."

Jonah did not stroll down to the harbour that day, he fled! He made great haste and we have to ask ourselves, "Why?" Why this rush to move out of the will of God? Was it a sense of his own inadequacy? Was it that he was very aware of the great wickedness of the city of Nineveh to which God was sending him? Perhaps he was afraid that he would lose his life in that city noted for its violence and cruelty. Many of God's prophets had suffered martyrdom for their faithfulness to God's word and Jonah would know this. So we must ask the question, "Why did Jonah run away from the will of God?" Was it amazement? Was it astonishment that Gentiles, whom the Jews regarded as dogs, should hear the message of God and His mercy to those who repent of their sins? It could have been any of these things that made this man of God run away, but I believe the real reason is something different.

Jonah was always very honest about his feelings. If you look at Jonah chapter 4 and verse 2 you have something of an insight into the heart of this man. When Jonah eventually arrived in Nineveh something very remarkable happened as a result of his preaching. The people repented of their sins and turned earnestly to God, and God withheld His judgement. But Jonah was very angry and he prayed to the Lord: "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? This is why I was so quick to flee from Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

What is this prayer telling us about Jonah? We find that Jonah had holy zeal for the glory and character of God, but he used human reasoning and human logic when it came to God's dealings with the people of Nineveh. When God's call came to Jonah, Jonah thought that if he preached judgement and the judgement was averted, then the people would misunderstand the character of God. They might regard Him as changeable in some way and easily swayed. Jonah was not afraid of death nor was he full of blind prejudice against Gentiles. His motive was sincere and genuine but he was very, very, mistaken. And because he was mistaken it caused him to disobey the word of the Lord to him. Almighty God, in His perfect wisdom, had commissioned Jonah, but Jonah had moved away from the word of the Lord. When God, in spite of Jonah's misgivings, showed mercy to the wicked city of Nineveh, Jonah could not come to terms with the situation and just wanted to die.

We need to proceed very carefully when we consider Jonah's disobedience, after all he was a man of God and a prophet. He was loyal and concerned for God's glory and he had the

highest view of God's character. Jonah did not want the name of the Lord to be dishonoured in any way. Is that true of you and me? But, the fact is that Jonah was wrong in his thoughts and in his actions, sincere though he may have been. What does this teach us? It teaches that we must do God's work in God's way. It is Isaiah who tells us that God's ways are not our ways, and His thoughts are not our thoughts. When we begin to move away from God's Word we start to use human wisdom and human arguments. If only Jonah had just obeyed God! He brought so many trials upon himself and others because he thought his way was best. Christian friend, do not run away from the will of God, but carefully walk the pathway of obedience.

Before we criticise Jonah for running away or for his anger when he realised that God had shown mercy to the repentant people of Nineveh, we must examine our own hearts. We do not always understand or know the pressures or trials that other believers are experiencing. We have never walked in Jonah's shoes, nor can we tell how we might have reacted had we been given such a commission by the Lord. The Lord dealt firmly but graciously with this prophet who had questioned His will and purposes. We read in Isaiah 42 verse 3: "A bruised reed He will not break; a smouldering wick He will not snuff out." This reminds us of the patience and gentleness of our God for He knows our weaknesses. How we need to pray with great compassion and understanding for our fellow Christians and particularly for those called to minister the Word of God. We should be humble and slow to judge for we are all weak. We need also to pray for ourselves. John Bunyan said, "Pray often, for prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice for God and a scourge for Satan."

Does this story of "Jonah who ran away" challenge you in some way? Has God been speaking to you from His Word concerning a service He wants you to do for Him? Has the Holy Spirit convicted you of something in your life that needs to be dealt with, repented of and forgiven? If so, do not harden your heart or try to close your mind to His prompting.

Perhaps you feel inadequate for the task placed in front of you. Perhaps you are afraid of the consequences of obeying God's will. Jonah's big mistake was that he ran away from the presence of the Lord. He ran away from the only one who could enable him to accomplish his God-given mission.

Whatever Jonah's motive for fleeing from God's presence, from the prompting voice of the Holy Spirit, he soon learned that God was not going to let him go. God was going to fulfil His purposes for Nineveh through Jonah despite the prophet's reluctance. How much better it would have been if Jonah had obeyed the first time. How much happier he would have been and what dangers and trials he would have avoided if he had gone straight to Nineveh. May we discover this lesson, that when the Lord calls He enables and He has promised His abiding presence with us. Are you on the way to some Tarshish today? Running away from God's will for your life? If you are, then turn back to the Lord and ask His forgiveness and commit yourself to doing His will. Only then will you find fellowship restored and real peace. Don't be a "Runaway Christian".

## The Storm

We are looking at Jonah chapter one verse four. This is what we read: "Then the Lord sent a great wind on the sea, and such a violent storm arose that the ship threatened to break up."

In our previous talks we discovered that the prophet Jonah was deliberately running away from the will of God. God had commissioned him to go to the great city of Nineveh and to preach against its wickedness and warn the people of coming judgement. Instead Jonah had run to the port of Joppa and taken a ship going in the opposite direction to Nineveh, to Tarshish. But God did not stop him from running away and Jonah had apparently been very successful in his plan to avoid God's purpose for him. Here is a child of God, commissioned by God for an important task, but he is not walking with the Lord, he is going his own way.

Here we have a picture of the backslider, one who is living in disobedience to the Lord. To such a one God is forgotten and He seems far away. Like the prodigal son in Jesus' parable, everything seems to be working out well at first. Jonah's plan to run in the opposite direction seemed to be going well, but God had other plans for His disobedient servant. Did Jonah really think that he could hide from God? Listening friend, are you trying to run away from God's will for your life? Do you seriously believe that you can outwit God, that you can hide from Him? God knew exactly where Jonah was and what he was doing, just as He knows all about you and me. Jonah thought that his way was best for him but he was wrong. Satan's snares and attractions always seem rewarding at first but they always end in tears and failure and trouble.

We should not be fleeing from God, but to Him. God is to be our hiding place. David said, "Rescue me from my enemies O Lord, for I hide myself in you." Jonah experienced many terrible trials before he realised that he needed God so much. Often those who run away from God's will find themselves facing many trials and hardships. Are you in that situation today? There is only one thing to do and that is to stop running, stop living in disobedience and come back to God and hide yourself in Him. He is a gracious God and if you are His child He longs for you to return to Him in repentance so that He might rescue you from your enemies and from your own waywardness.

So Jonah has set out on his voyage away from Nineveh and from God's purpose for him. Perhaps he was anticipating a pleasant journey across the Mediterranean Sea to Spain. It was not to be for very soon, as we read in Jonah 1 verse 4, "The Lord sent a great wind and a violent storm." The thought in the original Hebrew language is that the Lord "hurled a great wind onto the sea and there was a mighty tempest." This was no ordinary storm for it was God's doing, not merely nature, but the God of nature, the Creator Himself. You see, God does not forget His straying sheep and He will do all He can to bring them back. In Jonah's case the Lord was going to stop him in his tracks and prevent him from going to Tarshish.

Did God sent this terrible storm to discourage Jonah or even to destroy him? No, it was the discipline of a loving Father. Here was a man who was privileged, chosen, called and

commissioned, but self-interest had taken him over. He was a prophet whom God had used before to proclaim His word, but he is no longer walking with God. He is still a prophet but he has lost the vision and is occupied right now with his own little scheme. "After all, there are others far better qualified for this task than me", he might argue. "Who am I anyway? My faith is weak and small and I'm not worthy to speak for the Lord". And God answers his objections with a great storm.

This is no ordinary storm for it is divine in its origin and its timing is deliberate. But although it is a violent storm it is also an act of God's grace. Through the storm God's purpose is to turn Jonah around and bring him back to God's will for him. God's chastening is always with the object of drawing us back to Him. Sometimes He will allow storms into our lives to test our faith in Him.

You will remember the time when Jesus was in a boat with his disciples and while He was sleeping a great storm arose on the lake. Even the experienced fishermen grew afraid as the boat was in danger of being swamped. Jesus was with them, but He was asleep. "'Teacher", they cried, "Don't you care if we perish?" Their faith was being tested to the limit, but exactly who were they addressing in this way? It was the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord of all creation.

This is a significant incident because no Christian has ever had a storm free life. There are storms of trials at times, there are temptations and weariness. There are times when you will feel discouraged or frustrated. And then there may be times of persecution or rejection by family or friends. God allows storms like these to come into our lives so that we will be cast upon Him and realise that in ourselves we are nothing. "Don't you care?", the frightened disciples said to their Master. Of course He cared! He was teaching them the lesson that just as He was trusting his heavenly Father to keep Him in the storm, so they also should be trusting Him.

Peter, writing in his first letter chapter 1 verse 7 says: "These trials have come so that your faith - of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire - may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed."

So the storms God allows to come into our lives can be either to build our faith, or, as in Jonah's case, to discipline us and bring us back into his will for us. Jonah's storm was a gracious act of God especially for him, but his sin affected others, as it always does. Jonah was not alone in the storm for the consequence of his disobedience involved everyone on board that ship.

In Joshua chapter 6 we have the record of Achan's sin when he disobeyed God's specific command and stole from the city of Jericho. His sin led to the defeat of the Israelites at Ai and eventually to the death of his whole family. Jonah's disobedience and Achan's sin affected those around them. This is a very serious lesson that we discover here.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 14 verse 7 that "None of us lives to himself alone. None of us dies to himself alone." How we behave affects others. As individual Christians we are part of the body of Christ and we are to be mindful of one another in our actions. In Romans 14 Paul is teaching us about the influence we can have on those who are weaker in faith. By doing things that we consider good we may cause them to fall. So we must be

careful in both a positive and a negative sense, always mindful of the effect our behaviour will have on our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Jonah's action in running away from God brought trouble not only to himself but to all involved. God had said to him "Go", but Jonah had said "No!", and was running away to Tarshish. We are reminded elsewhere in Scripture that "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." We cannot defy God and escape the storm of his righteous judgement. There is a cost in following Christ, but there is certainly a terrible price to pay in disobeying Him.

The Lord Jesus said of Himself, "A greater than Jonah is here." In Christ we see the only one who was totally obedient to God, and yet He also experienced, as a man, the violent storms of life. He knew what it was to face opposition, temptation and rejection. He faced the storms of sorrow at the death of a friend. He knew the anguish of betrayal and denial. Most of all He faced the awful storm of Calvary as He who knew no sin was made to be sin for us so that we might find peace and forgiveness.

The great storm of final judgement is still to come, but it IS coming. Even in the middle of Jonah's storm the others on board that ship, we read in Jonah chapter 1 verse 14, "Cried to the Lord." And in verse 16, after they had thrown Jonah overboard, at his request, and the storm ceased, "They greatly feared the Lord, and they made a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows to Him." Ask the God who rules the storms to forgive you your sins, to make you an obedient child of God and to send real peace into your heart and into your life.

## Storm Damage

God has commissioned His servant Jonah to go to the very wicked and violent city of Nineveh and to preach against its sinfulness. However, Jonah has not obeyed the Lord, but has run away from God's will for him. He has boarded a ship bound for Tarshish in Spain which is in the opposite direction to Nineveh. Now God has sent a great storm that is threatening to overwhelm the ship and all in it. So we read in verse 5: "All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep."

Disobedience to God causes a lot of damage. People sin and they bring storms into their lives, into their homes, into their marriages and sometimes even into their churches. Like a violent wind storm, sin causes havoc and distress. Jonah's disobedience brought disaster on those around him and the effects of this great storm were three-fold:

First there was FEAR. These sailors must have experienced storms at sea many times, but this one was particularly violent. It was an unusually powerful storm. They sensed that this was something different and such was its effect that it caused them to cry out to their gods. They prayed for deliverance from the great peril in which they found themselves. So the second effect of the storm was that it caused these men to PRAY.

We discover three things from this prayer in the midst of the storm. First, in times of great danger people will often cry out to God for help. These sailors believed that there were gods who might help them in their distress, but their belief was misplaced. Their gods were false and powerless. This storm came from the Creator himself, the Living and True God whom they did not know. So many today cry out to God when they are in trouble, but sadly do not even consider Him when things are going well. So many pray not knowing the One to whom they address their prayers. These sailors were men living in great spiritual darkness. They were very superstitious and their praying was very misplaced.

Is that where you are today? You do not really know God and you only call on Him in times of trouble and when it is passed you forget God again. Perhaps God is speaking to you right now through some circumstance through which you are passing; some storm in your life that you cannot handle. The Lord wants you to turn to Him in repentance for your sin and placing your faith in Christ Who died for you. Then you will really know Him as a loving Heavenly Father Who cares for you amid the storms of life.

Secondly, this prayer in the midst of the storm reminds us just how weak and helpless and small and dependant we really are. Just when we think that we can cope with whatever comes our way, something happens to remind us that we are mortal and there are things that we can't control. It is at times like this that we realise that we need the help and protection and guidance of someone more powerful than we are. The Christian believer has such a one in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one who has promised never to leave or forsake us. He is the one who by His Holy Spirit lives in us to empower us to overcome in the battles of life. To be a Christian does not mean that we will have no storms

to face. It does mean that we have the never failing presence and help of God in the midst of the storm.

Thirdly, this prayer of the sailors shows us clearly that they had their own gods that were shaped and fashioned after their own ideas and imaginations and moral standards. We read in verse that, "Each cried out to his own god." Centuries later, the apostle Paul, speaking to the men of Athens, said: "I see that in every way you are very religious. For as I walked around and observed your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you." That's Acts 17 verses 22 and 23. Down the centuries men have made their own gods to worship and put them in the place of the true God of Heaven; this is idolatry.

We have to ask the question, "Has idolatry ceased in this great scientific age in which we are living?" We have to say, "No", for man is still the same. How different are we from these eighth century sailors? Man's nature has not changed for within us there is, as Augustine said, 'A God-shaped void' that needs someone or something to worship. Someone or something outside ourselves to whom we can turn in times of trial and trouble. Man's spiritual need has not changed, but it is the spiritual part of our lives that is so often neglected and God is forgotten or ignored until trouble comes.

So we have these two profound effects of the storm that has overtaken the ship in which Jonah is fleeing from God. First it produced FEAR and secondly PRAYER. Now we consider the third effect which was ACTION.

Verse 5 of Jonah chapter 1 says: "All the sailors were afraid and each cried out to his own god. And they threw the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship."

They knew, as we do, that life is far more important than things. In order to save their lives they thought they had to abandon their precious cargo to the sea that threatened to engulf them. Sometimes the storms of life are the very things that God uses to show us the reality of our situation. But often we try to find our own way out and by our own actions seek a way of escape rather than seeking God's help. We do not look for the real cause of the storm.

The real danger for the sailors was not the cargo on board, but it was Jonah. We read in verse 5 again: "But Jonah had gone below deck, where he lay down and fell into a deep sleep." How could this man of God sleep at such a time? This was not a peaceful sleep, it was, I believe, a sleep brought on by deep distress. Was it easy and without cost for Jonah to run away from God? Did he realise now that this storm was all his fault? This was a very dangerous sleep. Sleep means that we are unaware and totally insensitive to what is going on around us. Terrible things are happening around Jonah, the cries of the heathen sailors, the desperate situation. God is speaking very powerfully, but his eyes are closed and he can't even hear the raging of the storm.

There is a sense spiritually in which we can be like that. Perhaps we are conscious of having disobeyed the Lord in some way. He is dealing with us in love, for the Lord disciplines those He loves. But we are not facing up to the situation. We are closing our minds to the storm through which the Lord is speaking to us, hoping it will go away. That is a very dangerous spiritual state in which to be because while we are in it we are unaware of the desperate

plight of the lost and in no position to help them. Like Jonah, we have become ineffective and disobedient. We are spiritually asleep.

It was the old commentator Matthew Henry who wrote: "It is the policy of Satan, when by his temptations he draws men away from God and their duty, to rock them asleep in their own security that they may not be sensible to their misery and danger. It concerns us all to watch therefore."

We need to ask, "Am I represented in this verse? Am I conscious of my great need? Am I praying to my own god and just full of superstition?" If you are trying to face the storms of life alone, or trusting in some false god to help you, then turn to the only one who can help you. Turn to the Lord Jesus Christ who can deliver you from your sin, and who will then be with you through whatever storms may come your way.

Are you a sleeping Christian, unaware of the cries of the lost and content with so little? Have you lost your enthusiasm for God's work and His word? Have you ceased to examine yourself to see if you are walking in obedience? Have you lost your joy in the Lord and the desire to meet with His people? Have you lost your love for fellow Christians? If this is so, may the Lord wake you up from this sleep of disobedience to live again for Him who loved you and gave Himself for you on the cross. Just as God eventually delivered Jonah from his waywardness, so He is willing and waiting to receive you back and restore you to the place where He can use you for His glory.

## The Sleeping Church

This time we are looking at chapter 1 and verse 6. In the previous verse we see that God has sent a great storm and the ship is in danger of sinking. The sailors are full of fear and have cried out to their various false gods for deliverance. Trying to save the ship they have thrown the cargo overboard. Last time we finished by observing that while all this was going on Jonah was fast asleep below decks. So we read in verse "The captain went to him and said, "How can you sleep? Get up and call on your god! Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish." Here is a man of God sleeping while he and all around him are in mortal danger. I am going to use this situation as a picture of "The Sleeping Church." Jonah, as God's servant, represents the church. The captain of the ship in many ways represents the world. The captain has essentially two things to say to Jonah: the first is a REBUKE and the second is a REQUEST. The rebuke is, "How can you sleep?" And the request is, "Get up and call on your god!"

Let's look first at the rebuke. It was a fully justified rebuke. The master of the ship wasn't being malicious or vindictive. He was saying, "How can you possibly go to sleep when we are in such danger?" The truth is that Jonah was in spiritual conflict with God and it had taken its toll on him physically. He was exhausted, his energy was spent and all was not well between his soul and heaven. He had lost his peace so how could he pray?

Had Jonah been in the will of God, he might have replied that he was experiencing perfect peace and the calm of faith in the storm. He might even have quoted Psalm 46 verse 1 to 3: "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."

What a testimony that would have been! Are we missing opportunities to testify to the grace of God in different situations because we are out of fellowship with the Lord, as Jonah was? Or are we seeking to shine as a bright light in a dark world so that men might praise our heavenly Father? Isn't this how we were drawn to Christ? What if our spiritual teachers had been asleep, how would we have known about the Saviour? Are you a sleeping or a shining Christian?

No wonder that the captain of the ship was amazed that Jonah could be so sound asleep when all around him was chaos and danger. He appeared to have no concern for the situation. He appeared indifferent and the captain demands that Jonah too pray to his god like the rest of the crew. Christians who are spiritually asleep are lukewarm to the needs of those around them. One of the first casualties of spiritual lukewarmness is prayer for the lost.

Look for a moment at the nature of Jonah's sleep. Men and women on board that ship were about to die and the need was great. They were doing all they humanly could, but to no

avail. They were throwing the cargo overboard and they were placing their faith in false gods. In these circumstances the master of the ship could not understand Jonah's attitude to the situation. Is it possible that the people of the world might say to us, "You say you believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and yet you seem to be asleep. You don't seem to take it seriously that people are perishing and facing a lost eternity."

The challenge is this: do we pray for those around us who, by their own efforts or by their false religions are seeking to gain salvation? They do not know the Living and True God or His Son Jesus Christ and yet we are lukewarm in our attitude towards them in their desperate need. It is probable that the captain was angry with Jonah, and we could say that the world has a right to be angry with us as Christians if we do not point them to the only Saviour and appear indifferent to their plight.

The apostle Paul said: "If the trumpet does not give a clear call, who will get ready for battle?" (1 Corinthians 14:8) But what if there is no sound at all, just silence? Sleep means silence and where there is no vision, no sense of responsibility, no compassion, then the people perish. But don't we all have a tendency to become spiritually sleepy? We need to stir up ourselves continually. Our love for the Lord Jesus Christ is like a fire, it must be watched and poked and replenished. The flames must be fuelled and fanned by our constant watchfulness in prayer and the reading of God's Word.

So here is Jonah being rebuked by a man who did not even recognise him as a man of God. The second thing he says to Jonah is a request as he says to Jonah: "Get up and call upon YOUR god!" He is saying in effect, "We are calling on our gods, you call on your god." His second statement is a pathetic longing, "Maybe he will take notice of us, and we will not perish." He had no certainty that his own god would either hear or answer his prayer. Here is a superstitious man and all his crew about to lose their lives in the storm begging this sleepy man of God to pray for them. The reality was that it was only Jonah who could pray. His prayer would not be directed to the false gods of the world, but to the God of Heaven, Maker of all things, the very one who had sent the storm in the first place!

The prayers of God's people are so important! The prayers of obedient Christians are heard by the Lord. James says in chapter 5 verse 16 of his letter: "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." O the mystery of prayer, the seeming contradiction that we are told to pray and yet our prayers are actually prompted by the Holy Spirit according to God's will. You may well say, "God knows everything, so why should we pray?" The answer is quite simple, God commands us to pray. Paul, writing to the Philippian Christians says this: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." (Philippians 4 verse 6)

The Lord Jesus Himself set us a great example of prayer and how we should pray. We know that God uses the instrumentality of prayer in a mysterious way. Through it He teaches and trains us into a deeper knowledge of Himself. As we go through crises and difficulties in our lives and as we pray, we have a new understanding and appreciation of God's love for us.

In our prayers we are to claim the promises of God. We must never demand things from God, but we must approach Him with reverence and godly fear. We must approach Him

through our Lord Jesus Christ. He is the only way to God. He is the one who, by His death for sins on the cross, has opened up the way into the holy presence of God for us. The Holy Spirit prompts our prayers and we ask in the name and authority of our Saviour.

Are you a sleeping believer or are you a praying believer? May we have discovered much to challenge and help us from Jonah who slept in the midst of the storm.

## Jonah as a Picture of Christ

This time we are going to view the prophet in a different way. That he was a servant of God is undoubted, but we have seen so far in these talks that he is in fact running away from God's commission. We have seen him on board a ship bound for Tarshish when God had sent him to preach against Nineveh. Tarshish was in the opposite direction. We have seen that the Lord sent a great storm that threatened to swamp the ship and drown all on board.

While the storm was raging Jonah was fast asleep below deck seemingly oblivious to the danger they were all in. He is challenged by the captain of the ship and asked to pray to his god that they may all be saved. Finally Jonah has to admit that it is because of his disobedience that God has sent the storm. He confesses that he is a Hebrew and that he worships the Lord, the God of heaven who made the sea and the land. The seamen are even more afraid and ask what they must do. Jonah tells them to throw him overboard and then the storm will cease. And so Jonah was cast into the sea and it grew calm.

The verse we are looking at is Jonah chapter 1 and verse 17. This is what it says: "But the Lord provided a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was inside the fish three days and three nights." In chapter 2 of Jonah we have Jonah's prayer, his cry of distress to the Lord, and in verse 10 we see that the "Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land."

Now I said at the beginning that we are going to look at Jonah in a different way. We are going to see him as a picture or analogy of the Lord Jesus Christ. There are many pictures, or types as they are called, of Christ in the Old Testament. For example we have Joseph, David, Elisha and Adam. In various ways they are all types of Christ and Jonah also can be looked at in this way. We have the authority for this in the words of the Lord Jesus Himself recorded in Matthew chapter 12 verses 38 to 41.

"Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgement with this generation and will condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here."

So, according to the Lord Jesus Himself, Jonah's experience is a picture of the death and resurrection of the Saviour. In Jonah chapter 2 verse 2 we read the beginning of Jonah's prayer from inside the great fish that had swallowed him: "In my distress I called to the Lord, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry." Again, in verse 6, he says: "But you brought my life up from the pit, O Lord my God", referring to deliverance from death. Compare this with the prophetic language used

of the Messiah in Psalm 16 and verses 9 and 10 where we read: "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay." The Lord heard Jonah's prayer and the fish that had swallowed him came to the shore and disgorged him onto the beach. To all intents Jonah had been dead, but now he was alive again. So here we have a graphic illustration of a death and a resurrection.

Secondly, as we consider this analogy between the experience of Jonah and of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is very evident that Jonah had been thrown into the sea and swallowed by the great fish as a result of the purposes of God. Neither the punishment of Jonah in this way, nor the death of the Lord Jesus can be described as normal, natural events. Both events were the sovereign work of God acting as judge and in both cases the demands of His justice were met.

As soon as Jonah submitted willingly to be cast out of the ship into the sea, and seemingly to his death, we read that the raging sea grew calm. Jonah said to the sailors, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea, and it will become calm." Because of his submission to the judgement of God the lives of all in that ship were saved. So the Lord Jesus submitted Himself to the judgement of God, not against His own sin, for He was sinless. For your sins and mine He willingly went to the cross and was punished in our place so that we might be saved from the wrath of God.

So in this analogy, this picture, we see a sacrifice that satisfied divine justice, abolished guilt, restored peace and brought about reconciliation. As soon as Jonah submitted to the justice of God peace was restored and the storm abated. This picture, this analogy, helps to show that the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ completely satisfied the righteous and just demands of God Who is utterly holy and the judge of all men. His justice has been totally satisfied by the death of Jesus on the cross when He died for the sins of the world. Through that death He has made peace for all who will repent of their sins and believe.

This is teaching that is fundamental to the Christian faith. Virtually every false teaching denies some element of this truth. Some deny that there is a penalty for breaking God's law. The Bible calls the breaking of God's law - sin, and that "The wages of sin is death." This is the punishment due to those who disobey God; not only physical death, which we all must face, but also spiritual death which is separation from God for ever. Sin is compared to work for which wages are given, or to the master who pays the wages. This is the very law of life; touch fire and you will be burnt; jump into the sea and you will get wet; play with a poisonous snake and you are likely to get bitten and then die.

God says in His word the Bible, "The soul that sins will die." He said to Adam, "Disobey my command and you will certainly die." Sin is so serious that it must be atoned for, a price must be paid. This is why in the times of the Old Testament the blood of sacrifices had to be shed so that sin could be covered, be atoned for. This is why the precious, sinless Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, had to die in agony on a cross. When Christ died for our sins He paid the full cost in Himself as He was punished in our place. He was the sinless one made a sin offering for you and me. His was the once for all sacrifice which did not just cover sins but took away the sin of the world. Isaiah, in that wonderful prophecy recorded in chapter

53 says that: "He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

The next thing we discover about this figurative death and resurrection of Jonah is that it was like a gateway through which he passed. On the one side he was in the Jewish world, and on the other he entered the Gentile world as he took God's message to the city of Nineveh. Like the apostle Peter many centuries later, Jonah had to learn that God's ultimate purposes included not only the Jews but also the Gentile nations.

So too, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ was the breaking down of the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles. Writing about this to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul says this in Ephesians 2 verses 14 to 17: "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility."

Finally, Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh. We read the words of Jesus to the unbelieving crowds in Luke 11 verses 29 and 30: "This is a wicked generation. It asks for miraculous signs, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah. For as Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so also will the Son of Man be to this generation."

God sent his prophet to preach against the wickedness of the Ninevites, to warn them that judgement was coming if they did not turn from their wickedness and seek God's forgiveness. In this Jonah was a sign to the people. The Lord Jesus is God's last sign to this world. In verse 32 of Luke 11 Jesus went on to say: "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgement with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now a greater than Jonah is here."

The Jews constantly asked Jesus for some miraculous evidence, something that they would accept as proving who he was. But they would not believe even the greatest sign, the resurrection of Christ from the dead on third day.

So we have discovered that in the prophet Jonah we can see a picture of the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. At best it is only a shadow of the reality. But have you responded to message of this gospel that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners by the offering of Himself on the cross? That He died, was buried and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures? May you, like the people of Nineveh long ago, turn to God in true repentance for your sins and may you place your trust in the finished work of the Lord Jesus on the cross.

## Jonah's Prayer

The story of Jonah and his attempt to run away from God's will for him, of how he boarded a ship and how God sent a raging storm, and how eventually Jonah was thrown overboard to save the lives of the crew, and how Jonah was swallowed by a great fish sent by God, is probably one of the best known stories in the Bible. But it is not merely a story made up to teach us something. The story of Jonah is a true account of something that actually happened, and certainly it has much to teach us as we have been discovering. We know that these things really did happen because Jesus said so.

In chapter 2, then, we pick up the story as Jonah cries to the Lord from inside the great fish. Here is a man at the end of his resources. In chapter 1 we read of how he ran away from the will of God to preach his word in the wicked city of Nineveh. He has been disobedient to God and now he is facing the consequences. He finds himself in this horrible prison in the depths of the sea. Jonah knew full well why he was in this awful predicament. So we read in Jonah chapter 2 verses 1 and 2: "From inside the fish Jonah prayed to the Lord his God. He said: In my distress I called to the Lord, and He answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry."

Jonah had run away and now God was dealing with him so as to bring him back again. Jonah knew that he had been disobedient and the first result of God's dealings with him is that he prays. In the Psalms David refers to a great sin in his life and how after his sin he kept silent. He went through a most tormenting experience and this is recorded for us in Psalm 32. But in Psalm 51 we read how eventually David turned to God in prayer and found forgiveness for his sin.

On the boat, in the middle of the storm, Jonah had been asleep, but he certainly is not asleep now! Action is required and that action is to get back into touch with his God, to confess his disobedience and seek His forgiveness. In his extremity he calls to God for help. Humanly speaking his situation was hopeless, but in spite of this Jonah still had faith that God would deliver him.

Jonah's prayer reminds us of the words of John in 1 John 5 verse 4: "This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith." Jonah's situation illustrates the conflict between sense, that is what is seen, and faith, that is what is not seen. The environment around him is oppressive and hostile. His senses and emotions are at their lowest ebb, but Jonah places himself at the mercy of the Lord. He looks to God to deliver him out of the depths of the grave as it were. As the hymn writer puts it: "Faith laughs at impossibilities and cries, It shall be done!" Paul teaches us that we do not walk by sight, but we walk by faith.

Sometimes we have to trust through times of darkness when we do not understand what is happening. For the Christian believer, trusting in God, there is the certain hope that God is working for the good of all who love Him. We read about Abraham that "Against all hope,

Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations. Just as had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'" (Romans 4 verse 18)

Abraham's hope did not rest on the circumstances or on his own reason but solely on the promise of God. Even when it seemed humanly impossible for a son to be born to Sarah he believed God's word to him. There is a determination about true faith.

We discover three things in this prayer of Jonah as he cries out to God from the depths. We see his situation, we see the one in control of the situation, and we see the effect on Jonah.

First then, the SITUATION. Never before had prayer been offered from such a strange place - the inside of a great fish! It is obvious from this prayer that Jonah was very familiar with the Psalms. He actually quotes from seven different Psalms as he prays. Here was a man who knew and loved his Bible and who knew the value of quoting Scripture in his prayers. These Psalms helped him to express his thoughts and longings to the Lord. There is a lesson for us in his example.

That great Christian commentator of a previous age, Matthew Henry, said: "There is no place amiss for prayer. I will that men pray everywhere." Wherever we may find ourselves there is a way open heavenwards. Jonah was at the bottom of the sea and yet out of the depths he cries to God. What a situation to be in! How could anyone pray in such a place? The answer is that we can pray to the Lord wherever we are. Time and place and situation are no barrier to our prayers, only unconfessed sin will prevent the Lord from hearing us. The Psalmist says "If I had cherished sin in my heart the Lord would not have heard me." (Psalm 66 verse 18)

Daniel prayed in the lions' den. The Lord Jesus prayed on a mountain, and in a garden and on the cross. Paul prayed by a river, in a prison and on a storm-tossed ship. The apostle John prayed on a lonely island in the Mediterranean Sea as one outcast for his faith. And here we have Jonah praying inside a great fish. Christian friend, do not allow anything or any situation prevent you from praying. Christians must above all be praying people.

Now we move from the situation to our second point which is THE ONE IN CONTROL of the situation. All of this was the work of a loving but righteously angry God. In verses 3 and 4 Jonah prays: "YOU hurled me into the deep, into the very heart of the seas ... I have been banished from YOUR sight."

Here we discover that God disciplines those He loves. Sometimes He will use the ordinary trials of life to turn us back to Him. In Jonah's case He used created things to chasten him. Jonah was running away from God's will and so God intervened in a dramatic way to stop him. David also experienced the disciplining hand of God as we read in Psalm 39 verses 9 to 11: "I was silent; I would not open my mouth, for YOU are the one who has done this. Remove YOUR scourge from me; I am overcome by the blow of YOUR hand. You rebuke and discipline men for their sin ..."

Although God's disciplining of Jonah was severe it was the discipline of love. The purpose was to restore Jonah to the place of obedience. God was in control of the situation because He had brought it about. It was

God who raised the storm and it was God who prepared the great fish to swallow his reluctant servant.

Perhaps you are going through a time of experiencing God's discipline in your life. Listen to the words of Hebrews chapter 12 verses 5 to 7: "Have you forgotten the word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. "Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?"

If you are under God's discipline, respond to it. Call on Him as Jonah did and be restored. Read the rest of Hebrews chapter 12 and be encouraged!

And the third thing we discover in the prayer of Jonah is the EFFECT of it all upon him. He feels he has been cast out of God's sight and is facing certain death. Here is a man who has known what it is to have a real and living relationship with God, but who now feels as though he has been banished from God's sight. Separation from God is an awful thing. It means separation from the source of eternal life. It means separation from His love, and it is eternal in its consequence unless we turn to Christ for salvation.

On the cross, as He took upon Himself our sins, the Lord Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" He went through this separation so that we need never experience it. I must ask you, are you separated from God and still in your sin? Perhaps your feelings are being expressed in this prayer of Jonah. If they are, then turn to God in repentance and place your faith in Christ who gave His own life so that you could be reconciled to God.

For the Christian there is the promise that there is nothing in earth or heaven, no power or authority that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Even when we are disobedient His love is sure. But we will experience His discipline.

Finally in verse 9, at the end of Jonah's prayer we have a note of real hope: "But I, with a song of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. Salvation comes from the Lord." Here there is not only hope but now there is obedience and the renewal of his vows as God's prophet. He is saying to God in effect, now I WILL go to Nineveh according to your command. At that moment Jonah's fellowship with God was restored and we read in verse 10: "And the Lord commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah on dry land."

May this prayer of Jonah speak to you in your situation.

## The Great Commission

For this study we are looking at the third chapter of the Old Testament prophecy of Jonah. Jonah has been rebellious, he's been disciplined and he's been chastened. The book begins with the word of the Lord coming to Jonah. As we have already discovered in this series, God has dealt very powerfully with his servant, but as we come to chapter 3 verse 1 we see how gracious the Lord is: "Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time."

Jonah is not only pardoned for his disobedience and restored to favour, but he is also recommissioned to his office as prophet. Jonah's prayer had been heard from inside the great fish that swallowed him. This verse in Jonah chapter 3 gives hope and encouragement to all believers who have failed God. God is very gracious and very merciful. He is unchanging and we see this in the words of the Lord Jesus Christ to Peter. Peter who had denied his Lord three times with oaths and curses, was graciously recommissioned as the Lord said to him, "Feed my sheep."

Both Jonah and Peter were brought to the place of true repentance for their sin and both were forgiven and their fellowship with God restored. Listening friend, if you have failed the Lord in some way and feel that there is no way back, look at the example of God's dealings with Jonah and learn that He is always willing to pardon and restore those who return to Him in true repentance.

And then, in verse 2, we see that Jonah's commission is renewed, but we note that it is slightly different to that in chapter 1 and verse 2. On the first occasion he was told to "preach AGAINST the city and its wickedness." This time he is told to preach TO the city. God says to him, "Proclaim TO it the message I give you." God has not changed his mind, but something has happened. Jonah's own experience had taught him the possibility of forgiveness and restoration. This was something that he would not previously accept as possible or even desirable for the Ninevites. Now Jonah cannot proclaim any other message. His very experience cries out "Look at me! Look what has happened to me!" Jonah WAS the message, he was a living testimony to the grace of God towards those who repent of their sin.

If you are a believer, if you are one whose sins have been forgiven through faith in Christ's death for you, then the same is true of you. You are a living evidence of God's mercy to repentant sinners. This is what Paul was saying when he wrote these words to the Christians at Ephesus: "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might show his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life." (Ephesians 1 verses 15-16)

Jonah's experiences are a sign pointing to the gracious ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was for three days enclosed by death, but who was raised by God on the third day a conqueror over the grave. After his resurrection the disciples were given that great commission to go into all the world to proclaim his death and rising again and that forgiveness of sins is possible for all who repent and believe.

One of the first signs of a true willingness to turn back to God is that we are willing once again to be obedient to his word and command. In verse 3 of Jonah 3 we are told: "Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh." He is no longer running away but going.

Here was a very large city both in area and population. It was a notorious place, known throughout the region for its wickedness and cruelty. Was Jonah beginning to realise just how much God cared about the people of that city? Why else would God send him again to take the message warning them of impending judgement?

So, in verse 4 we see this message of warning as Jonah proclaimed "Forty more days and Nineveh will be destroyed." As Christians we have a message of warning and judgement for a sinful world, and yet a message of mercy and grace. God was speaking to those people through his servant. It was an earnest and a serious message, a life and death message. And so is the message of the Gospel; it is serious; it is not to be trivialised in its presentation by the methods used. It is God's message and it is to be communicated in ways that honour Him recognising that the weapons of our warfare are spiritual and not of this world.

Note that Jonah said "Forty MORE days and Nineveh will be destroyed." The day of grace was being extended to give the people the opportunity to repent of their evil ways. We are living in God's Day of Grace. He is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to salvation in Christ. Jonah knew how long the people had - they had forty days. We do not know how long this Day of Grace will last, and so how much more the urgency to make the Gospel known!

In verse 5 we see the response of the Ninevites to the message Jonah brought. It says, "The Ninevites believed God." It was not the messenger they believed, but the one who had sent the message, God Himself. This was God's powerful word at work and there is evidence that they genuinely repented of their wickedness and sin. We read that they "declared a fast and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth." Even the king joined in this expression of mourning for this was a contrite city under the conviction of the Holy Spirit.

What was the result of this great and genuine response to the preaching of God's Word? We read in verse 10: "When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened."

We have already discovered God's infinite patience and compassion towards his disobedient servant Jonah. Now we see his compassion towards this ungodly but repentant city. How gracious and loving is our God! In the New Testament God is described as "Rich in mercy" and having "Great love towards us." In his mercy and love God sent his one and only Son

into the world to die on a cross. He did this so that sins could be punished in Christ, Who was sinless, and so that those who repent and believe can be forgiven.

The Ninevites knew that they were under the judgement of God, but they cast themselves upon his mercy. They said: "God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." (Verse 9)

If you are not a Christian - not trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ as your only Saviour - then do not be lulled into a false sense of security for you stand condemned before God. Here is what John says in chapter 3 of his Gospel, verses 17 and 18: "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever puts their trust in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe (put their trust) stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's only begotten Son."

If you are not a believer; if you have not yet realised the danger you are in, then like those Ninevites respond to God's love and turn to him in repentance, accepting Christ as your Saviour and Lord.

So clearly, this third chapter of Jonah has two major lessons for us to learn. The first is that every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ is under a great commission. It is a very serious and earnest commission. We must be faithful in proclaiming the Gospel to a world that is under the judgement of God. The second lesson is that if we do not know Christ as our Saviour and are still in our sins, then we need to repent and to turn to God with all of our hearts.

## Compassion

We come now to the last talk in this journey of discovery through the Old Testament book of Jonah. This time we are looking at chapter 4 and I've called this talk, "Compassion."

This interesting and unusual Bible book is a story of "Commission", "Contrition", "Conversion" and "Compassion". It is a story of deep emotions. We have seen Jonah running from God. We have seen pagan sailors fearful and actually worshipping God. We have seen Jonah, swallowed by a great fish, desperately praying. And we have seen his great joy at his deliverance. Then there was the tension of Jonah's preaching of impending judgement to the wicked city of Nineveh. The result of his preaching was the very real repentance of the Ninevites and their turning to God.

And now in chapter 4 we are unexpectedly confronted with these words: "But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry." You may well ask, "Why did Jonah become so angry?" We find the answer in chapter 3 verse 10: "When God saw what (the Ninevites) did and how they turned from their evil ways, He had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction He had threatened."

It seems amazing that it was the great compassion of God towards the people of Nineveh that caused Jonah to be angry. He just could not take delight in the conversion of a vicious and heathen people. In becoming angry he lacked reverence towards God, and he certainly had no affection for the people. His attitude was the same as the scribes and Pharisees centuries later when they criticised Jesus for mixing with sinners and healing on the Sabbath Day.

The repentance of Nineveh put the obstinacy of Israel to shame. Jonah in his pride as a Jew was disturbed by what God was doing. God was being gracious and merciful to Gentiles while Israel faced his anger and judgement because of their unbelief and disobedience. In forgiving the sins of the repentant Gentiles in Nineveh, God's actions were prophetic of the day when Israel as a nation would be set aside. In that day the Gospel of God's grace through Jesus Christ would be proclaimed to all peoples, both Gentiles and Jews. In Romans chapter 11 we have a detailed commentary on this.

Jonah had a zeal for God, but it was a misplaced zeal based on wrong ideas about God and his purposes. There are many people like that today. It is possible to be very religious, very zealous, and very knowledgeable about religious things, and yet have a cold, hard heart and a wrong spirit. This was the problem with Jonah. In chapter 4 and verse 2 we read that he prayed to the Lord. This was very different prayer to the one he prayed from inside the great fish! This was a complaining prayer in which he tries to justify his original disobedience in running away. In it he shows just how narrow a vision he had of God's compassion. He says: "O Lord, is this not what I said when I was still at home? This is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity."

Jonah is actually quarrelling with the very character of God. We see that Jonah was a very critical man, a very tragic man who could not submit to God's perfect will, either for himself or for others. He had a very narrow, even selfish, vision of God. He had so recently been the recipient of God's mercy and compassion himself, but his heart was not big enough to rejoice when others came into this same blessing.

How large is your vision for those who are still in their sins and facing the righteous judgement of God? Do you long to see them come into the same blessings that God has showered on you? Or are you content to keep them to yourself because you feel, as Jonah undoubtedly did, that there are some who do not deserve God's compassion? Not one of us deserves the mercy and grace of God and yet He has freely given his Son to die for us, and having saved us continues to give us all things in Christ. God's message of mercy is for all people and He has given to Christians this message of reconciliation to share with the same compassion that He has shown us.

Jonah's vision is so clouded by his prejudice that he now prays an astonishing prayer for a man who has so recently been saved from drowning. In verse 3 he says: "Now, O Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live." In other words he is saying, "If Nineveh must live, then let me die."

Jonah has seen wonderful things happen. He has seen a notoriously wicked city respond to the preaching of God's Word. He has seen even the king of that city repent in a very public way. He has seen God's judgement averted and many lives saved. We are told in the New Testament that there is great rejoicing in heaven when just ONE sinner repents and turns to God, but here is a whole city! And yet Jonah is angry and he wants to die. God reproves him with one short question: "Have you any right to be angry?"

This is a very gracious word from the Lord. It appeals to his conscience, but Jonah still has much to learn about the compassion of God as we shall discover now. Verse 5 tells us: "Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city."

He still cannot believe that God is going to spare the Ninevites. Perhaps he is hoping that God's judgement will fall on the city. God is still dealing with his reluctant prophet and he is going to show just how wrong Jonah's attitude is. How patient the Lord is with this man. How patient He is with you and me when so often, by our behaviour or by wrong attitudes, we try his patience.

Jonah is sitting out in the blazing sun under a shelter he has made for himself. This shelter proves to be insufficient, and so we read in verse 6: "Then the Lord God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort." The Lord is not only being gracious to Jonah in doing this. He is going to use it as a parable to teach Jonah something.

We read that he was "very happy about the vine." It was delightful, it was refreshing, it was comforting, it was just what he needed. And just when he thought that everything was as it should be, we read that God took the next step in this lesson. He used one of the smallest of creatures, a worm, to chew the plant so that it withered and left Jonah exposed to the sun and a scorching east wind. It was so uncomfortable that Jonah becomes miserable

again and says, in verse 8: "He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than live." All his comfort is gone now.

God was using this whole situation as a parable for Jonah. In verse 9 he says to him: "Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?" Jonah replies, "I do. I am angry enough to die!" Now God applies the lesson He wants Jonah, and each of us, to learn. Here it is in verses 10 and 11 of Jonah chapter 4: "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than one hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?"

God is saying to Jonah, "Your priorities are all wrong. You care more about the loss of this plant and your own comfort, than you do about the thousands of people in the city." Is there a lesson for us to discover in all this? Yes there is. We can become so materialistic and care more about things than we do about people in all their need. In a sense Jonah trusted in that plant, he rejoiced in it, but he forgot that it was God who prepared it for him. He only enjoyed it for a day, but that was enough to expose the condition of his heart.

God was concerned about that great city. Despite their wickedness He loved its people and that is why Jonah was commissioned to go and preach to them. In a previous talk I referred to the New Testament where the Lord Jesus Christ said of Himself: "A greater than Jonah is here." He came as God's greatest messenger with a message of salvation. He came in love, without prejudice, to a sinful world facing judgement and declared the compassion of God for us all. He was rich beyond measure, yet made Himself nothing and yielded Himself to death on a cross for your sins and mine. Have you responded, as the people of Nineveh did, by repenting of your sins and accepting Christ as your Saviour and Lord? You can do so just where you are.

Christian, do you have a heart of compassion for the people of your city, your town, your village who face judgement? There are five things that we must do: We must trust, love, obey and serve our Lord Jesus Christ, and then we can rejoice in Him always. These are the essential lessons we discover in the book of Jonah.