

EXPOSITION OF JONAH
The Uniqueness of Jonah's Mission
Jonah 1:1-3

Introduction: This morning we begin our exposition of one of the most fascinating Old Testament books, the Book of Jonah. You will find Jonah eight books from the end of the Old Testament. It is a little book, and one which will not take us very long to work through. But my hope is that you will see much of its relevance for today, and for our lives.

But first let's look at 2 Kings 14: 23-27 to read the only other Old Testament reference to Jonah. The days in which Jonah lived were not easy ones. Jonah prophesied here about the year 780 B.C. Israel seems to have been in poor condition, spiritually. And yet the Lord sends Jonah to predict an unmerited and very gracious working of His power on their behalf. The nineteenth, ^(century) Scottish commentator Hugh Martin says,

It is very remarkable that living as the prophet did, in a time of abounding provocations, when we might have expected his sole office in Israel would have been to denounce judgement on the apostate tribes and their ungodly rulers, the only one of his predictions on record, is that of a most gracious and generous interposition on the part of Jehovah in defence of His afflicted people...He gave military strength and skill even to a wicked king...Jonah has abundant evidence of God's singular long-suffering...and extraordinary patience.

If we were to sum up what the message of this book is, it would sound well like the quote from John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, "It is easier going out of the way when we are in, then going back in, when we are out." Jonah FLED from his Lord. He clearly had seen the compassionate grace of God towards Israel, and yet did but could not share God's vision for the rest of the world. Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet whom God sent to the Gentiles--God does care about unbelievers, even when they are desperately wicked!

Never let someone tell you that the God of the Old Testament is a God without compassion. It is a lie! Just read Jonah. Just sample, if you will, the abounding kindness and patience of the Lord in this book!

Now Jonah is unique for some other reasons that I would like to mention. The story in this book has a history among people of being either fiercely held to as historical fact, or considered laughable by its incredibility.

In 1973 the Lutheran Church. Missouri Synod was writhing from the all-too-often raging battle about whether the Bible is reliable or not in what it says. I remember reading a Time magazine article about the fight. There were street demonstrations in St. Louis, and everything. One conservative lady

was interviewed, and in the spirit of the conservative element in the Missouri Synod, she said, "If the Bible said that Jonah had swallowed the whale, I would have believed it!"

Jonah is unique because he is the only minor prophet mentioned by Jesus. Further, he is the only minor prophet that Jesus likens to Himself. Also, Jonah is the only prophet so far as I know, to conceal his message.

The Book of Jonah is really Jonah's biography. Technically speaking there is only one prophecy in the book and that is in chapter three and verse 4. We do not read of Jonah's repentance at the end of the book, but we hope that he did come around. But WE have the opportunity to learn from Jonah's mistakes, and to share God's desire for OUR total submission to His will. And if we learn nothing else from this book, may we become captivated by two things: that God is sovereign, and that God is the savior!

Jonah 1:1 and 2 At the very beginning of the account, the command comes to Jonah to "MOVE OUT." There is not time to prepare, no time to form a committee. No time to pray about it and see if it is God's will. Make no mistake about it, Jonah, it IS God's will! It's a tough lot for Jonah--Before Isaiah is sent he is given a glorious view of the Lord as King. Before Jeremiah "heads them up and moves them out" he has a confidential conference with his heavenly Father. To Jonah there is given no vision, at least none which Jonah records--he gets no conference to CONSIDER and mull over what to do. The message that God has for Ninevah is so urgent, SO IMPERATIVE, that there is no time for Jonah to afford himself consideration.

Sometimes, the ministry is like that, dear ones--we want everything to be working on OUR schedules, nice and SLOW-like! But there is an urgency sometimes to what we are doing as Christians, that we must hop on the train NOW! The job needs to be done NOW!--not next week, and not even tomorrow. Sometimes people need comfort, counsel or some other kind of help RIGHT NOW! Sometimes the discipline of the Christian life requires an almost military-kind of discipline. Sometimes the Lord expects us to simply submit, without asking questions, without explanation, and without delay, to an absolutely sovereign demand. Jesus is your Savior, if you have received Him personally as such. But He is also your Lord. In our American society, we do not know much about having lords. But Jesus is OUR LORD! He is sovereign over us, and there are times when we cannot afford to waste time in obedience.

The situation in Ninevah was indeed desperate. Ninevah was the capital city of the Assyrian empire. The site today is located near Mosul, Iraq.

The Assyrian empire was very powerful. But sometimes in conquering new lands, in the typical expansionism of that day, there were not enough troops to leave an occupation army everywhere, as the later Roman empire was more able--and so, to get the message across that they expected complete submission to their rule, the Assyrians (the Ninevites) were given to a little extra brutality WHILE they were "in-country."

One thing they would do right after defeating a defending army would be to round up some of the outstanding citizens and slay them in front of the people. They were fond of ripping people tongues out (no anesthesia, of course). They were known for tying people up on the ground, and stretching them, and then flaying them alive, that is, removing their skin. Then they would hang up the skin on the city walls. The people got the message--"when the Assyrians are in town, MAN, you don't mess with them.

All of these gruesome things are only an outward manifestation of the heart of the Ninevites--and people ask themselves, "Does God care?" Does He CARE about the violence, the wickedness, the injustice in the world? Or if He does care, can He do anything about it? In many non-Christians' minds, there is a dilemma: either God is all powerful, and He doesn't care--or, He cares, but He isn't powerful enough to do anything about it!

And what a tragedy it is for those non-Christians to view God that way! And with many issues today, people ask, "Why doesn't God DO SOMETHING?!!"

Well, with the Ninevites, God did do something. He called Jonah. He didn't just put out a request for someone in Israel to volunteer to go over to Ninevah and preach against what they were doing--He called Jonah. And when Jonah wouldn't go, God said, "OK, we'll do it the hard way--but you WILL go..." And today, God is doing something about the condition of the world...make no mistake about it, God is no less sovereign, no less involved, and no less interested in the affairs of the world TODAY, than He was 2,800 years ago!

But with the living God, there is also another PRINCIPLE at work: God is long-suffering...so He waits to move, until the right time. Jesus Christ came into the world at exactly the right time. The Lord works in our lives at just the right times--He sends people along to encourage us, He sends the right Christian into the non-Christian's life--across his or her path, AT JUST THE RIGHT TIME--and He deals with wickedness in the world today, in His own timing, and in His own way. He gets to run His own schedule, BECAUSE HE IS GOD. He is sovereign.

Jonah thought, "This is Mission: Impossible!" But God was doing something. Jonah thought maybe that God would just find someone else, but God was doing something. Jonah figured if he just took a cruise to Spain (which was probably where Tarshish was) that the problem would resolve itself in time without my messing with it...

Jonah 1:3 It is absurd that it happens, but it does and quite commonly: that a believer can think that he or she can escape the presence of the Lord. Jonah figured a change in surroundings was in order. He knew that the living God, that Jehovah is spirit--that He is omnipresent. He may even have read, or even HAD A COPY of Psalm 139 written maybe a hundred or so years before his time,

Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy

presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Thy hand will lead me.

It almost sounds like the Psalmist is writing about what is going to happen to Jonah!

But sin does this to people. It blinds us, even Christians...Non-Christians are completely blind about sin, except for the light that the Bible sheds on the subject. By DEFINITION, non-Christians are bound by sin, and no matter how hard they may try, they cannot free themselves from it. But even Christians can become so PRACTICED in sin, that they are blinded by it.

Ask yourself the question now, "Why did Jonah run?" Maybe it was fear of the cruelty of the Ninevites...Or, since God was apparently giving the Ninevites the chance to repent and be forgiven, Jonah might have feared of becoming considered a false prophet, if his oracle about Ninevah's destruction didn't happen...After all, he was famous for his fulfilled prophecy about the successes of Jeroboam II in the 2 Kings passage. But probably, Jonah just didn't want God to be God--full of compassion for all mankind, and willing to offer forgiveness to a people other than Israel.

It is after all possible to become jealous--God may save someone you or I weren't sure should have been. What if you read in the paper tomorrow morning that Moammar Quadaffy has professed having come into a relationship with Jesus Christ, or the Ayatollah Khomeini? Or the head of the Russian KGB? Would you immediately rejoice?

Well our God is a sovereign God, whose grace and compassion go far beyond ours...that is why we need to be constantly tying into His love, and asking Him to help us reflect more of His love--to have more of His perspective on the world--and to not be shackled by our own prejudices, or shortsightedness. This is the message of Jonah--God is a saving God, and He is a sovereign God. He is not one or the other. He is full of compassion for the person who humbly turns to Him. But He is also a holy and just God, and will not allow sin to go unpunished. The message of God's love without the message of God's judgement on sin, is an empty and anemic message.

God meets us where we are. He sovereignly brings about His plans for the world, and by His sovereign grace, He rescues many out of the torrential flow and certain destruction of sin. Are we plugged in to what God is doing in the world today? Christian, are you willing to answer IMMEDIATELY God's call to you to serve Him, in whatever He calls you to do? We can never flee the presence of the Lord. We must learn to be willing to obey the commands of God, and sometimes not to wait! For the needs of the world today will not wait...

EXPOSITION OF JONAH
The Doctrine of Crawfishing
Jonah 1: 4-16

Introduction: When many people hear of the Book of Jonah they probably think of the great fish in the book. And maybe they might have heard of the city to which Jonah was sent, Ninevah. But the section before us this morning is probably unknown to most people...the circumstances leading up to Jonah's inspection tour of the fish's gastrointestinal tract.

We have before us the account, in some detail, of Jonah's decline. Last week I suggested that this book contains two overriding messages for us: that God is sovereign and that He is a gracious Savior. Notice I did NOT say "AND YET He is a gracious Savior," or, "HOWEVER, He is a gracious Savior," because to believe that God is both sovereign and savior DO NOT contradict.

We also said that for Jonah and for any Christian, the way OUT of fellowship with God is easy! Once a believer BEGINS to slide, the way down is easy! Once you're IN the quicksand, its easy to stay in and to keep sinking--and this idea we will look at more this morning, because this morning we are looking at the "Doctrine of Crawfishing."

When I was a boy, we used to go down to a place called Farmer's Hill. There was great sledding there in the Winter, and at the bottom of the hill is a creek--in Winter, the object was to fly down the hill on your sled, and AVOID the creek! In summer, we spent many hours playing by, around and IN the creek at the bottom of Farmer's Hill. And in the summer the creek had crawfish in it, and we would catch them, tie them on to strings, etc.

One thing you learn about crawfish, when you're trying to catch them, is that they paddle backwards like crazy when in danger of being caught. (Reputedly, Virginia crawfish trace their roots to New England lobsters, but I'm not sure I believe that fish story!

So when I use the term "crawfishing" this morning, I mean the process of paddling backwards to escape God's will. And we will consider three things about crawfishing in the believer's life, from the life of the prophet Jonah:

For the believer, crawfishing is a dead end.

Crawfishing affects other people.

But even crawfishing can be used by God.

CRAWFISHING IS A DEAD END (Jonah 1: 4-7) Jonah has booked passage on a ship bound for Tarshish, which was probably all the way at the other end of the Mediterranean Sea in Spain. He has figured that if he could just

change his surroundings the problem of doing God's will might just disappear. But God is not one to be escaped. It was Jonah's choice to buy his ticket. It was Jonah's choice to flee the Lord, or to TRY to. But here this crawfish is paddling backwards to escape the Lord, and it just backs him into a corner.

Notice in verse four it does NOT say that there AROSE a great wind on the sea. It says, "the Lord hurled a great wind on the sea." Now I am not, of course, denying that there is a rational basis for the storm arising. God is the ruler of Creation, but He has designed Creation as a series of causes and effects. The National Severe Storm Center would have one scientific explanation for the reason for the storm, but ultimately it is because God wanted it as such. He had a purpose for this storm, that Jonah would see that his crawfishing was a dead end. God is and always has been the ruler of Creation--as VAST and AWESOME as the sea is, it is no refuge from the sovereign God. The sea will do His bidding just as well as any other servant!

Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters; they have seen the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep. For He spoke and raised up a stormy wind, which lifted up the waves of the sea. They rose up to the heavens, they went down to the depths; their soul melted away in their misery. They reeled and staggered like a drunken man, and were at their wits end. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distresses. He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed. Then they were glad because they were quiet; so He guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men!

Psalm 107:23-31

In fact, it seems just a little irrational to me that Jonah would think that the sea, in all its possible fury and rage would be a place to escape the Living God...but nevertheless, he did.

Now the situation on board is pretty desperate...the only reason mariners GO to sea is for profit pretty much. So we know that the storm was indeed bad when they start jettisoning their profit, the cargo. But old Jonah is'nt even watching THIS sideshow--he's asleep below deck!

It is not uncommon, when a Christian is crawfishing, to lose all concern for the lost. A person on the slide is often quick to jettison any evangelism he had been carrying on. Conversely, a Christian who is IN fellowship with the Lord, will be interested in the state of the lost...

Its interesting to me that the mariners cast lots to see who was the cause of the storm. We are not completely sure what casting lots WAS. Dr. John Hannah (from Dallas Seminary, not from the New England Patriots) suggests that they were marked stones put into a container, with one taken out. At any rate, God showed His sovereignty over Jonah's life by causing the lot to fall on him.

The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.
Proverbs 16:33

At the end of the first chapter of Acts, we see the apostles doing this, (but only after prayer). They used this somewhat mystical method to determine guidance from God. BUT WE MUST REMEMBER THAT IN THOSE DAYS, people did not have the Holy Spirit. They were more dependent on such things by which to determine which direction to take. Christians today can fall back on methods like this too--

I heard of a man who liked to flip open his Bible every morning and find a verse randomly, and that would be his guidance for the day. One morning he flipped open and pointed down to Matthew 27:5, "...and he went away and hanged himself." Not being really sure if that was the guidance he was supposed to have, he tried again and opened to Luke 10:37, "...Go and do the same." Being further confused he thought he would try a third time and flipped to John 13:27, "...What you do, do quickly." ...I imagine that's a story.
S. Lewis Johnson, Sermon.

But if we are so childish as to mishandle the word in this way, then God will use it just the same, and find some way to encourage us...He will probably accommodate us, and use whatever methods we come up with to build us up. BUT dear ones, guidances comes CLEARLY through applying the principles of the Word of God, taken in their context! The Bible is not some magic book, that we put our hands on and its truth moves into us by osmosis.

So, once again, Jonah cannot escape his God by backing way. He only gets in more trouble. In short, it just doesn't pay to crawfish.

CRAWFISHING AFFECTS OTHER PEOPLE (Jonah 1: 8-12) Jonah's disobedience affects other people. He thought that just hopping on the first scalloper (or whatever) out of the harbor wouldn't affect anyone, and he would just sort of quietly slip out of town. But disobedience ALWAYS affects other people.

At the beginning of the chapter, can you see that Jonah neglected the WORD OF GOD? And he does so again, because the sailors have to ask him what he's all about, and what he stands for. Jonah was reluctant to share the truth with pagans! But he tells them by verse 10 that HE is fleeing the God of Creation.

Secondly can you see that Jonah neglected PRAYER? Was Jonah praying? No. The pagans were praying--praying their hearts out! But Jonah is below deck sleeping.

Actually, a Christian OUT OF ELLEWSHIP is dangerous! When we fall into sin, it affects other people. We like to think sometimes that we live in a vacuum--or we try to make our LIVES like a vacuum. Sometimes we figure, "If I insulate myself from any deep relationships, then nobody will get hurt when I decide to screw up..." We try to eliminate the risk in being involved with people, having a ministry, and just growing in Christ--because sooner or later, growing in Christ MEANS having some kind of a

ministry! We must not think that we can avoid affecting other people, if we foul up. That is part of the price in disobedience--other people are hurt.

And I have thought some this week on why God used a storm--it seems that He could have gotten the message across to Jonah without involving others. But God is so brilliant! And His sovereignty is so fascinating to me--God is using a storm not only to really get Jonah's attention, and to draw him back into fellowship, but to reach the sailors too! We'll see more of this at the end of the section.

So, I hope you will dwell for a moment on the subject of the effect of a Christian being out of fellowship:

1. It hurts his own well-being, because there is no BETTER place to be, than walking with the Lord Jesus Christ and doing His will.
2. It hurts his (or her) family. In our families we are much more dependent on each other than we care to admit. If I am doing what I need to be doing, Renee and the girls are the direct beneficiary, in so MANY ways.
3. It hurts the Body. I do not mean to lay a guilt trip on anyone here this morning, but you should know that it is a responsibility you bear, if you neglect to use your spiritual gifts for the edification of the Body. Being out of fellowship can be harmful in so many other ways in a church. A person can say then, "Rather than hurt anyone, I'll just stay away from the Christians I know." To this the Scripture replies,

"For the Body is not one member, but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand, I am not part of the body,' it is not any the less a part of the body...God has placed the members, each one of them, just as He desired." 1 Cor. 12:14-18
4. It hurts the world. If we do not share the Gospel, who will? I know that God is sovereign. I know that He will save whom He will save. But He has chosen and designed that WE should be His instruments. If a Christian is out of fellowship, the Gospel doesn't get spread--the love of Jesus remains something the non-Christian hears about on television, but he doesn't get to see it in real life.

ON THE OTHER HAND, it is a blessing to be around someone who IS walking with the Savior! You get encouragement, you get faithfulness, you get joy, you get to watch God work, you get the benefit of THEIR spiritual gift, you get friendship, you get ALOT!

BUT EVEN CRAWFISHING CAN BE USED BY GOD (Jonah 1: 13-16)

I think verse 13 is the most amazing verse we have looked at this morning! Because here the world seems more honorable than the church! Even KNOWING with whom their present predicament was sourced in, these pagans weren't ready to just chuck him in the sea. The Hebrew says they "dug deep with their oars." But even though Jonah has been reluctant to even share the

truth with them, at first, they are still showing patience with him. But they cannot prevail against God's intentions either--and they clearly ACKNOWLEDGE it in verse 14,

For Thou, O Lord, hast done as Thou hast pleased.

So, they go ahead with the execution. Jonah has resigned himself to drowning--this is why I don't think he declined the command to go to Ninevah out of fear of the Ninevites). He says, "So be it--let God do what He is going to do."

But I think it is most incredible what happens next--these men seem to be converted! I do not know if its the whole ship, or most of them or what! But its pretty exciting! Point: the sovereign God has taken a fleeing prophet, and turned one bad situation into the salvation of a bunch of people.

In fact there is a STRUCTURE to this chapter that I would like to to see:

- a1. Narrative (Storm Begins); Jonah disobedient, vss.4-5b.
- bl. Sailors' Prayer (each to his own god), vs. 5b.
- cl. Narrative (Cargo ejected; Jonah sleeps), 5c-6a.
- dl. Captain's Command (Get up and Pray!), 6b.
- el. Sailors' Speech (Let's cast lots!), 7a.
- fl. Narrative (Lot falls to Jonah), 7b.
- gl. Sailors' Speech (Who are you?), 8.
- h. Jonah's statement and Response of fear, 9-10a.
- g2. Sailor's Speech (What have you done?), 10b.
- f2. Narrative (Implications of Jonah's fleeing), 10c.
- e2. Sailors' Speech (What shall we do to you?), 11.
- d2. Jonah's Command (Throw me into the sea!), 12.
- c2. Narrative (Sailors try to row back to land), 13.
- b2. Sailors' Prayer (to Jehovah, about Jonah's death), 14.
- a2. Narrative (Jonah ejected; Storm stops) and response of WORSHIP; 15,16.

Other than being of merely technical interest, can you see that this structure is given to SHOW that underlying some pretty scary circumstances, God is working to bring about His gracious plans?

Now let's briefly review: God called Jonah to do a job. God intends for the pagan people of the capital city of the Assyrian Empire to have a last chance to change their ways. Jonah says he's not the man for the job, and we can't help but wonder if he just doesn't want to have anything to do with such pagan people! So he tries to evade His God. But the hold of a ship doesn't camouflage him from the gaze of the Lord. In fact in hurling a hurricane (or something similar) in Jonah's path, God intends to save the sailors too !

What a great God we have, dear ones! Even though we sometimes crawfish; and sometimes frantically...our God doesn't give up on us. We may give up on each other, but the Lord Jesus Christ doesn't! I hope this gives you courage and resolve to carry on this week as you live FOR THE SAVIOR!

EXPOSITION OF JONAH
The Great Big Fish and the Little Minor Prophet
Jonah 1:17-2:10

Introduction: Of all the "stories" in the Bible (I prefer to call them historical narratives), the story before us this morning is one of the most famous. In fact, I would call this story the number four hit, on the all-time list of chartbusters, as far as Bible narratives go. After the story of Noah and the flood, the birth of Jesus, and the death and resurrection of Jesus, I would say that probably the story of Jonah and the big fish is most well known...

It is said (DeHaan) that when a dog bites a man, that is not news. But when a man bites a dog, THAT is BIG NEWS! And so it is with the Scripture before us this morning! When a man catches a fish, its not generally headline material (unless its ME catching a bass!)--but when a fish catches a man, well now THAT is something to look into!

So far in this book, I have suggested that you consider TWO OVERRIDING MESSAGES-- first that our God is sovereign, and second that being sovereign, He is the savior. At the end of this morning's passage, is a simple statement, "Salvation is from the Lord" (2:9c). In Hebrew it is just two words, "yeshu'atah leyhwah." In fact, in this usage of the word salvation in Hebrew, THERE IS AN EXTRA LETTER--for emphasis! (Norman Snaith's Notes on the Hebrew Text of Jonah) THIS is the message of the Bible! Salvation yeshu'atah leyhwah... Salvation is not of the church. Salvation is not of the ordinances, or the sacraments. Salvation is not of baptism. Salvation is not of culture. Salvation is not of doing good to other people, or doing the best that you can! Salvation is of the Lord! This is the message of the Bible--nothing could be simpler--nothing could be more pressing and urgent for a world bent on tearing itself apart at the seams!

Last time, we left Jonah sinking in the Mediterranean Sea. He has been flung overboard, amidst the solemn worship of his converts. He probably struggled to stay afloat, but he must have quickly succumbed to the raging breakers of the storm at sea--and he starts to sink...

Jonah 1:17: This verse is really verse one of chapter two in the Hebrew text--it is a fitting "scene change" as we go from being on board a struggling merchant marine ship on the surface with the howling storm around them, the poor sailors probably having to yell at each other just to be able to HEAR each other--to the quiet of the deep.

Now I think much time could be spent discussing this fish, whether this

actually happened as we read it here, and how it COULD have happened. In fact I spent some time this week studying the question--but our time is limited, and rather than fill your ears with a lot of dialogue about the fish and Jonah's internal tour of the fish, I would rather emphasize some lessons for our daily lives. But I think it not right to simply gloss over

such an extraordinary event without SOME brief consideration:

It is not a new thing to laugh at this story. Lucian in the second century didn't believe it. Augustine in the fifth century tells of teaching on this book, and hearing people snort out in his audience. And it is of course a common thing for many more liberal preachers, theologians and critics TODAY to try to find some alternative explanation of this story, rather than to take it at face value. I take it at face value. I believe the Bible to be accurate in ALL that it affirms and to contain no error. I believe in the "historicity" (I apologize for using a five syllable word) of the account of Jonah and the big fish. But various other explanations have been suggested through the years, as a means of escaping the incredible account we have before us--

Some suggest that Jonah did not really land in a fish's gullet,

but he managed as he was thrown into the sea to take refuge on a dead carcass, and on that dead carcass, he floated to safety. Or, perhaps Jonah was picked up by a ship that came by with a

fish on its prow, and that's the explanation!

And then others have said, that well, Jonah just dreamed the

whole thing.

It seems to me that the explanations offered by the critics are harder to

believe than the miracle itself. And this is really only one of seven miracles in this book up to this point! God caused a violent storm (1:4), had the lot fall on Jonah (1:7), calmed the sea when Jonah was thrown overboard (1:15), commanded the fish to swallow Jonah (1:17), had the fish transport him safely, had the fish throw Jonah up on dry land, and perhaps greatest of all, MELTED THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET'S HEART, (Dr. John Hannah).

In my thinking we must have an inquiring mind, but a believing mind about

the miraculous nature of God (from our FINITE perspective). What Jehovah did to preserve Joah is not normal. Storms at sea are commonplace, but not storms that rise and fall instantaneously. Plants sprout and grow, but not overnight. Worms eat and destroy vegetation, but not within a morning. Great fish devour people, but not generally sustain them and disgorge them alive onto the shore--nevertheless, such things are possible when we are talking about dealing with the sovereign God! So, it is not irrational to me to think that maybe this fish was a sperm whale, or a whale shark. Sperm whales are known to have swallowed unusually large objects, including a 15-foot shark mentioned (in Cruise of the Cachalot Round the World After Sperm Whales, 1898, Frank T. Bullen). Others have written that whale sharks have swallowed men who were later found alive in the shark's stomach (in the Rhineodon Typicus) --John Hannah.

The primary authentication for the account is given by Jesus:

...for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly

of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. Matthew 12:40

But as one commentator puts it,

The point of the great fish and all the other agents by which

Jehovah touches Jonah's life is that the Creator God is breaking into His ordered creation and literally moving heaven and earth to save His people. --John Kohlenberger III, Jonah and Nahum. He can do that! He is God, and our lives as Christians are underwritten,

grounded, and energized by the fact that our God is not a god of our imaginations! He is not just some philosophical crutch for us to encourage ourselves in. He is not just "the system" so that we can have place to go on Sunday mornings. He is that sovereign Creator. He is the sovereign Savior! Praise God that we can know Him personally, and by His grace! Praise Him that He has revealed Himself and that He is ACTIVE among the affairs of men!

Jonah 2:1-9: So here Jonah was: in the belly of this fish, and now he

somehow finds the time to have a Quiet Time. And his prayer is something else! Jonah's trials "led him back to the truths of Scripture that he learned in earlier years. In times of deep distress, it is the truths of Scripture that sustain us!

For Jonah it is fragments from no less than nineteen Psalms that come

back to him! When we are pressed by circumstances--when we are emotionally broken--when we are terrified--it is not the little songs that we sing which will probably come back to us: in times of trouble in our lives, it is not "Do, Lord" or "Put Your Hand in the Hand..." that will sustain you. It is the Scripture that you have tucked away in your heart!

We have talked alot in recent months about the notion of a Christian

giving up on the Christian life, about throwing in the towel, to the world's seductions, to weariness in ministering, to being caught by doctrinal error, etc., etc. In each case where a Christian fails in his walk with the Lord, I must wonder if there was an ongoing practice of reading, meditating on, and memorizing the Word of God. It makes me think of something Paul wrote to his friend Timothy,

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become

convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them; and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 2 Timothy 3:14,15

Dear ones, God's Word is powerful. It is the most prized possession we

have. Christians in many communist countries would do much to own one. And in the Moslem world there are few Bibles.

Brother Andrew of Open Doors Ministries, recently went into Iran.

"In the midts of the Islamic revolutionary country of Iran, a nation at war, there is an army of brave of brave Christians who are ready to step into the gap and say, 'Here is the message: Jesus Christ is the way.' The Church is very restricted in movement, and even the Bible Society cannot import or print anymore here, but the believers are saying, 'Give us the Bibles, and we'll get on with the job.'"

Let's recommit ourselves to be a people of the Book! Its the SCRIPTURE that will sustain us when we face trials. And its the truths contained in Scripture--about God's sovereignty, His mercy, His providence, His love, His protection, His provision--that will become precious to you! Verses 5 and 7 tell us that Jonah was almost gone. I do not believe that

he did die. But I think he was pretty far down. He sensed that he was about to die by drowning. At that moment, he remembered the Lord. His concept of God at this point is not of a god who points His finger and says, "You got yourself into this, now get yourself out." Sometimes the notion that "God helps those who help themselves" is a very cruel idea! Jonah remembers that he HAS committed himself to the Lord--he HAS said, earlier in his life, "I am yours, Lord." He has submitted himself to the LORDSHIP of God. And now, that commitment comes back to him, and it is a comfort to him. Now he states, "Salvation is of the Lord." When a believer crawfishes, or, wanders away from the Lord, sometimes he

must be brought pretty low before he remembers the Lord. Charles Spurgeon says something here I like:

Sustained by distinguishing grace, a man learns to glory in tri-

bulations also; and strengthened by electing love, he defies the hatred of the world and the trials of life--suffering is the college of orthodoxy. Many a Jonah, who now rejects the grace of God, only needs to be put into the whale's belly and he will cry out, with the soundest free grace, "Man, salvation is from the Lord!" Prosperous professors, who do no business amid David's billows and waterspouts, may set small store by the blessed anchorage of eternal purpose and everlasting love. But those who are tossed with tempest...are of another mind.

quoted by S. Lewis Johnson

Sometimes a man or woman running from the Lord must be brought low before

they return to the Lord. It is not because God delights in sending afflictions. It is not because God is someone to be fled! In the final analysis it is IRRATIONAL to flee the true God. You can be in no better place than to be in His will. You can have no better advocate, provider and protector than Jesus Christ. You can have no better friend than Jesus Christ. You can have no more understanding and helpful COMFORTER than the Holy Spirit! Then, you ask, WHY do people who ARE believers run away from this God? Because they are still capable of sin, and severe sin!!! You and I, dear ones, are immune from NO sin. It seems strange that a child of God can do all kinds of wickedness still. But the Lord will bring them back to Himself. He is patient and may take a different route or schedule than we might, but nevertheless, as with Jonah, sooner or later the wayward believer will awaken to the fact that in reality he has seaweed wrapper around his head, and it stinks!

At THAT point, he will find the Lord unchanged. He will find the Lord

still waiting, as the father of the prodigal son, willing to take the child of God back, and restore all the blessings of fellowship!

But the point for you and me this morning, is, why put ourselves in that

position? Why take an unnecessary trip to the bottom of Buzzard's Bay

(or however the Lord would have to get YOUR attention)?

Why not KEEP growing in grace, and not waste part of your life (which is a fleeting vapor) in rebellion. Let's learn to love our Savior. Let's determine to love His word and to read it every day. Let's learn of the great love with which Jonah's Lord loved us. Its a profitable use of time!

EXPOSITION OF JONAH
With the Lord's Leading, No Task is Too Great
Jonah 3:1-10

Introduction: So here Jonah is...standing on the beach, after spending a long weekend in the stomach of a large fish. He probably stank. His skin might have been discolored from the gastrointestinal juices of the fish. But he is alive, and no doubt thankful to His God for his life. Chapter Two dealt with a minor prophet and a major fish. Chapter Three tells about the task that still lies before the prophet.

I surely hope you are seeing something of just how sovereign our God is. His purposes are not thwarted by the occasional (or frequent) DISOBEDIENCE of His people. I hope you can also see from this little book just how much lovingkindness our God has: even THOUGH His people are sometimes very disobedient--even THOUGH they sometimes go to great lengths to escape doing what they KNOW He wants them to do--He continues to love them. He continues to provide for them, and perhaps MOST INCREDIBLY He continues to USE THEM!

It is indeed a signal instance of (God's) grace when the rebellious servant is not only pardoned...but even replaced in office, and allowed again to serve the Lord in special duty in His Kingdom.
Hugh Martin, Jonah

It is hard for me to imagine a more dramatic case of divine discipline than the case of Jonah. But I would like to remind you that when God disciplines His own, it is not out of malice, mischief or meanness--it is in the best interest of the child of God; in fact if a believer falls under the discipline of the Lord, it is a PROOF that God DOES care for him or her, and that He is moving to sanctify that individual more for Himself.

For those whom the Lord loves, He disciplines...Hebrews 12:6

When the Lord painfully chisels and polishes a living stone (a term the Bible uses to describe a Christian), it is for some special place in the temple: and it will be seen to have acquired under His hand a special fitness for its place. --Hugh Martin.

There is a GREAT DIFFERENCE between the way God deals with the sins of Christians and the way He deals with the sins of non-Christians. He deals with the sins of all; NOTE: Christians are not sinless, they are forgiven. An unbeliever's sins will be dealt with in TIME, and in ETERNITY. The believer's sins are dealt with in TIME ONLY, because Jesus paid for them in eternity!

The CONTRASTS between the sins of the Christian and the sins of the non-Christian are important, and I would like to say something about this before we go on in the Book of Jonah. God does not deal the same with all people. He is COMPLETELY fair and just, and the offer of salvation is made to everyone...

UNBELIEVER
Divine Judgement

1. God acts as a Judge
2. Against God's enemies
3. Directed towards a sinner
4. A JUDICIAL act
5. For those NOT of God's household
6. Retributive
7. Flows from God's wrath
8. Punishment for sins
9. Eternal
10. A just punishment

BELIEVER
Divine Discipline

1. God acts as a Father
2. For God's children
3. Directed towards a son
4. A PARENTAL act
5. For those OF God's household
6. Remedial
7. Flows from God's love
8. Correction for sins
9. Temporal
10. A gracious concern

(Chart from Dr. Jack L. Arnold's Notes on Progressive Sanctification)

Jonah 3: 1,2 So we find Jonah several days later facing the same task. He must go and preach against a whole city--BY HIMSELF, with no staff, with no budget, with no promotional campaign, with nothing but God's call in his heart.

Sometimes the Lord burdens you to do something that seems altogether IMPOSSIBLE to accomplish. You may not even be able to ARTICULATE to other people what exactly it is. You don't have to. You just have to do it...But I will add a proviso: God never tells a Christian to do something that contradicts His written Word.

Three times Ninevah is called a "great city." The city was surrounded by an inner wall and an outer wall. The inner wall was huge - 50 feet wide by about 100 feet high, and about eight miles around. The OUTER wall encompassed fields probably and smaller towns (one of which, by the way, was called Rehoboth Ir. Jonah was told to preach to the "great city" which probably meant that which lay within the OUTER wall.

His instructions were to simply travel the 550 miles to Ninevah and preach the message the Lord. Please note that in the recommissioning of the prophet, God did not repeat the REASON for the proclamation--Jonah had no information shortage. He KNEW what God wanted Him to do, and how to do it.

If you're a Christian this morning, what is God's commission for you? Does God still want people to involve themselves in the lives of OTHER people, or is that just part of the "myth" of the Book of Jonah, as the critics would consider it?...I am persuaded that God is VERY interested in whether or not you have some involvement with other people--whether you are involved in some kind of ministry. Jesus told His disciples that they would be His "witnesses." The Christian should have it as a high priority to tell people about Jesus Christ, that He is the answer to the sin problem...that He is the Way, the Truth and the life...that He is the Bread of life!

Many times its that first word in verse 2 which we struggle getting by. Its the "arising" that we wrestle with. You don't have to be a Christian very long before you get the message itself clear in your mind. You don't have to be in Dartmouth Bible Church very long before the content of the

Gospel is clear in your head. The problem is getting up out of the easy chair, spending some time in prayer and preparing yourself to share the message with someone--and making that phone call, making that friendly visit, going by that guy's place of business and just being available, OR even going out and doing some "cold-turkey", confrontation-style evangelism.

Now you may be asking, "Is it really all THAT urgent?" Yes, it is. Without a personal acceptance of the Savior, a person--any person is faced with the reality of paying for their own sins. Salvation is a FREE GIFT. It can't be earned or bargained for. But salvation--eternal life--forgiveness of sins can all be had just by trusting in Christ. Dear ones, we need to take this message to the Ninevites in our age...NOT BECAUSE we are any more naturally righteous than they are--but because the peril of perishing without the Savior is very, very real.

Jonah 3: 3,4 Now Jonah's message was simple. I think he probably had more to say than what we have here. This is perhaps Jonah's synopsis of the message, as he was recording all these events in later years. But the message is simple: "...About six weeks left! About six weeks left!" God doesn't make it complicated, about what He requires of men.

He requires today what He did then -- a change of life. He requires a person to SEE that they are lost, to BELIEVE it, and to humble themselves and receive God's solution to the problem. The solution to the problem is the same: the finished work of Messiah. At THAT point He was yet to come. Today He has already come. The Ninevites faith was to look forward to the work of Israel's Messiah: indeed, the Messiah of the world. Our faith is to look back on that completed work.

Now how do people TODAY respond to the message of pending judgement? Is the need any less urgent today? How would our national leaders respond if God somehow told America to change its ways? Would we? Or have we outgrown the need for old-fashioned repentance? I think we need to pray for national repentance. As nations go, we do alot of good around the world, but I need not dwell on the scourge of immorality in our land in so many areas.

Jonah 3: 5-10 It is exciting to read about the response given to this one man's message. The whole city repented. Jonah didn't reach 20%. Jonah didn't have a 50% success rate. Jonah couldn't boast about having evangelised 97% of the populace. He had a 100% SUCCESS RATE! Why? Because Jonah's God is sovereign and because Jonah's sovereign God determined that these pagan Ninevites were going to get a chance. He is also the Savior. His justice and wrath are satisfied by the work of His Son on the cross. His love is satisfied by the call to repentance that He issues them, and by calling them into a saving relationship with Himself.

It is exciting to watch the Lord begin to work in a person. You can see the evidence of the Lord's calling, as the heart begins to soften, the mind becomes MORE OPEN to the truths of Scripture, and finally a person trusts God to save them. The message is urgent. The person you are dealing with, or you if you are yet unsaved, may have forty days, or may have forty years. But even for the person with forty years, those years will pass so quickly. And no man knows when he will pass from this life. The MESSAGE IS URGENT.

BUT when God is working there is no need to badger the non-Christian. There is no need to manipulate, or pressure them. When the message becomes clear and the Spirit is at work, they will trust Christ.

Lastly, I think there is one great practical lesson for us here. When the Lord is in a project, there is NO TASK too great! While we wait on the Lord's timing in various things we are doing as a church, when the Lord is working IN our ministry, there is no limit to the miraculous work of God. So often churches view their greatest accomplishment as the successful erection of a big building. Perhaps one day soon the Lord will provide a new and bigger building for us. But the BIGGEST TASK we face as Christians is the reaching of the lost in our area, and participating in the reaching of the lost around the world. The second part of that task, is keeping the saints on the way, after they become Christians--its tending that soil, and discipling them. Its the work of follow-up and committing ourselves to each other AFTER the work of evangelism is complete. We can do this in a shack and we can do it in a cathedral, it doesn't matter!

Dear ones, we need to concentrate on those priorities that God is concerned about. Let's not become sidetracked off of our "prime directive" by little issues. Let's commit ourselves to reaching as many people as we can for Christ, and to the long term commitment to stand by each other, to share the love of Christ among ourselves, to NOT GIVE UP in our striving against sin, and to seeing the sovereign, supernatural God work in every task He would have us put our hands to!

Postscript: Notice again in verse 10 that last little line, "And He did not do it." God does not delight in judgement. What He delights in is people worshipping Him, and receiving His grace. Grace means UNMERITED FAVOR. The Book of Jonah is a story of God's grace. It is a story of sovereign grace. The Ninevites repented. But the final line sums it up: "And he did not do it." Our God is so excellent. His mercies are NEW EVERY MORNING. Let's keep these things in mind as we worship Him as a Body each week, and in our own private times of worship!

EXPOSITION OF JONAH
Skulking and Sulking
Jonah 4: 1-11

Introduction: Just when we think Jonah has acted out all the weirdness that can possibly be, we arrive at Chapter 4 of the book and encounter a new twist in the story...But let's review:

In Chapter 1 the Jewish prophet Jonah, from Gath-Hepher gets a commission from God to go to the capital city of the Assyrian Empire, Ninevah, and preach to these pagans. The message God commands him to preach is one intended to secure their repentance, and therefore their salvation.

Jonah declines the command, and heads in the opposite direction, several thousand miles away.

But God sends a terrific storm and the ship is about to go down. Jonah "fesses up" to the sailors that his disobedience to God's call is the REASON for the storm. But EVEN THEN, these sailors don't chuck him overboard--not until it is clear it is the only way their ship will be saved...

Seemingly that is the end of the prophet, and well, God will just find somebody else to do His work--but NO!! God has "prepared" a big fish that will be Jonah's own personal submarine for 72 hours or so, and then the fish vomits Jonah up on dry land...Jonah then decides to go to Ninevah after all, and there he warns them that they have "about six weeks left!" His message is URGENT, and so is the message that Christians today bear--those who reject God's offer of salvation are in great DANGER of God's righteous judgement.

Much to Jonah's surprise, the whole CITY repents, and God's mercy takes "front stage" in the minds of all--all that is, except Jonah!

This is sometimes the nature of men: even regenerate men, sometimes... IN THE MIDST OF QUITE A SHOW OF THE GREATNESS OF GOD'S POWER, HIS SOVEREIGNTY, HIS LOVE, MEN GET SIDETRACKED AND DISTRACTED BY THEIR OWN SELFISHNESS!!! Here God is in the process of saving 120,000 people all at once, and Jonah gets ticked off!

Jonah 4: 1-3 The Book of Jonah ends as it began, with Jonah and God. This is sort of a commentary on every person's life, according to the Bible. It comes down to you and God. I have found that many times people become very brave when surrounded by a cheering crowd, or even a few friends...A person can become quite bold, even arrogant, if they have their allies with them. I have also seen how an individual can derive great comfort from his own society of friends, and of course the way Jesus Christ has planned things, we are MEANT to be part of a society--the community of the Body of Christ...

But in the final analysis, it comes down to you and God. It doesn't really help to have belonged to numerous civic organizations. It doesn't really assist you in the end, to have all kinds of plaques and certificates on the wall, to have been a greatly esteemed person by those around you, to have controlled many people the way people in public position have...The importance of the public or communal side of a person's life **PALES** in the end, because its just you and God..

The Book of Jonah ends this way...When all was said and done, as far as Jonah's concerned, there's Jonah and God.

But I hope you have seen in this little book, the "wideness of God's mercy" (S. Lewis Johnson). I hope you have seen in Jonah, as the line from a hymn goes,

"The love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind,
and the heart of the Eternal is most wonderfully kind."

Chapter 3 ended with the little sentence, "And He did not do it." The Ninevites deserved it, but Jehovah did not do it. Every minute, every day, every century, every timeless agony of being eternally separated from God that the Assyrians might have faced would be earned, and God's mercy could not be bargained for, but He did not do it. God has not changed in all those years--He is timeless, and ageless. He is just as merciful today as He was in 780 B.C. We cannot gauge His love, we cannot end the discussion and close the book on the topic of His lovingkindness!

For God SO (Greek: "oste") loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16

Verse 1 says Jonah became angry--another case where the English translation just doesn't really get across the force of the Hebrew: in the original the idea is "he grew hot under the collar! It burned him...it ticked him off.

I think Jonah has an unbalanced patriotic zeal. Perhaps he knew from the prophets Amos and Hosea that Assyria would become Israel's destroyer in later years...so out of anger and disgust the prophet rebukes his Lord (an absurd notion) saying in essence, "I KNOW that You are a forgiving God, and NOW LOOK WHAT HAPPENED!"

Also, Ninevah's repentance would be a severe rebuke to Israel! After all, Israel is the chosen people. But God's love is open to other people too!

Jonah goes back and forth between the correct attitude and the sinful. In Chapter 1 he is disobedient. In Chapter 2 he gives true thanksgiving and praise. In Chapter 3 we see Jonah's obedience. And in Chapter 4 we see his displeasure. Jonah is a man much like us. One day he is walking with the Lord, and the next he is shackled by a sinful attitude.

Jonah 4:4 One of the things about having a good friend is that your friend is not quick to blow up at you if you say something inappropriate. That's one of the things that makes him a good friend--he is **PATIENT** with you...

Can you see that since Jonah is a believer, God deals with Him not only as a Father, and as a Lord, BUT ALSO WITH THE CHARACTER OF A GOOD FRIEND!? I'm so glad that the Lord's mercies are NEW EVERY MORNING, because I need fresh mercies every morning! Sometimes I can't believe the things I think or say to someone I really love. And God doesn't pull out a strap and crack Jonah across the mouth here --but He does question Jonah...

It is a lesson worth our learning: when dealing with someone who is hot under the collar, even with a child when they get angry, to ask questions about what they are feeling.

"Why do you feel that way?" "Have I done something wrong?"

Asking questions is a very tactful way to get to the root of the matter when someone is upset--its a much better way to respond to anger than the way we often choose: the lecture method. The lecture method is the quickest way to INFLAME a person already hot. But God in His wisdom asks Jonah if his anger is justified...Jonah replies, "Of course it is!" And then Jonah gets real melodramatic, but still God is patient. Still God is longsuffering. Discouragement is often the lot of the preacher...

The story is told (and it IS a story) that one day the devil wished to sell all of his tools and go out of business. An announcement was made stating that he was offering all of his instruments for sale, to anyone who would pay the price. On the night of the sale, all of the tools were set out on display, and what a sorrowful lot they were: malice, hatred, envy, jealousy, sensuality, deceit, and all the other implements of evil were spread out. But in one corner of the room was a harmless looking wedged-shaped tool, much worn, priced higher than any of the others...And someone asked the devil, "What is that tool?" And he said, "That's the tool of DISCOURAGEMENT." And the person asked, "Why is it priced so much higher than any of the other tools?" And he answered, "Because it is more valuable to me than any of the other tools. With it I can pry into a man's life and defeat him, when I could not get near him with ANY of the other tools... The devil's price was SO HIGH that he never sold it. He is still using it today...

Discouragement is often the experience of those who make their living in the ministry. Discouragement gives rise to selfishness. And selfishness gives rise to dissatisfaction with the daily grace of God. The devil greatly uses discouragement. We must fight it.

But God is so full of love and mercy, that He deals with Jonah! He deals with Jonah's discouragement, unjustified though it is. God's love is manifested even in our failure--because I believe in the perseverance of the saints. The life that God gives is ETERNAL LIFE, not POTENTIAL life!

Jonah 4: 5-11 Even though the prophet is out of the will of God, He is not out of the LOVE OF GOD! Even though he checks in at the Holiday Inn East, and sulks...the shelter was perhaps a kind of gazebo, and he sits and waits to see what will happen to Ninevah. And God is going to give him a lesson in Visual Aids.

Notice again that "God appointed a plant." Jonah's emphasis in this account is not in all the things HE did, but in what God did. The plant is perhaps a castor-oil plant, which can grow rapidly in hot climates, to a height of 12 feet, and has large leaves...

Jonah enjoys the plant, for it gives shade and beauty. Then as quickly as God grew this plant, He "appoints" a worm to destroy the plant. Then God appoints a scorching wind from the east. And now Jonah again asks for the Lord to take him home. Again God questions Jonah. Again Jonah is stubborn.

But God is still going to make his point. The point is well summarized in a quote from the Apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus:

AS IS GOD'S MAJESTY, SO IS GOD'S MERCY.

God is sovereign, and he is the Savior. God does the appointing. God also does the saving, out of His great mercy. His mercy is NO LESS than His majesty. Irresistable grace? Of course it is irresistable. Even a disobedient and sulking prophet cannot prevent God from accomplishing His purpose. And the Ninevites came because they were God's from the beginning.

The Book of Jonah ends abruptly. There is no neat epilogue, no conclusion. It just ends with Jonah and his God. And it finishes with God's statement of His sovereign grace in the world. God's grace reaches further than just Israel. And His grace reaches further than Dartmouth Bible Church, and further than the United States. Are we thankful that He has included us in His plan? Are we captivated, fascinated, in love with His love for us and for others? Let's defeat prejudice in our lives. Let's defeat short-sidedness in our ministry. Let's defeat discouragement when it sets in. Let's be a little church of people who recognize the majesty of our God, and who share the message of His mercy with those around us who have great need of hearing it.

If you are with us this morning and you have as yet never experienced the reality of forgiveness of sins and the conviction that eternal life is yours NOW, you can have these things. God sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to die and pay the penalty of sin that just like the Ninevites, we owe. Its not a religious trip. Its not just a psychological crutch for the weakminded. Its the answer to the age-old problem of sin. It cannot be earned. It can be had only as a free gift, simply by trusting in Christ to be your personal Savior.