

Jonah #4: How God Makes Us Into a Sign

by Ed Miller

The sermon explores how God transforms Jonah into a sign of His mercy and the power of repentance, ultimately leading to the salvation of Nineveh.

Duration: 1:05:21

Scripture: Jonah 1:12, Jonah 3:1-2, Jonah 4:11, Matthew 6:33, Acts 17:30, 2 Peter 3:9

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Repentance"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the story of Jonah and how God turned him into a sign. Jonah initially resisted God's commission to go to Nineveh and fled from His presence. However, God pursued Jonah and brought him to a point where he was willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of others. In chapter 3, Jonah finally obeys God's command and goes to Nineveh to proclaim a message of impending destruction. Surprisingly, the people of Nineveh believed in God, repented, and turned to Him, possibly because they had heard of Jonah's miraculous survival in the belly of a sea monster.

Transcript

Good evening again, and isn't it wonderful to see what the Lord does in these lives. My, how that thrills my spirit. At that age, you know, the Lord saves a life as well as a soul.

So precious. As we come to the study of God's Word, there's a principle of Bible study that is indispensable, and that is total reliance upon God's Holy Spirit. And I hope you never tire, maybe you tire of the way I express that, but I hope God always brings that principle to your heart and to your mind.

Whether you come to the Bible by yourself in some private place, or whether you come corporately as we're doing this evening, that Bible is like our Lord Jesus in that it is human and divine. There are two sides. We cannot neglect the human side.

You've got to study. You've got to understand the language and the background and the relationships and so on. But there's also a spiritual side, and God has ordained that He is the only teacher of that side.

And if we're going to get the heart of God, God must teach us. There are no books. There are no commentaries.

It's the Lord. It's the Spirit of God that shows us His Son in that precious book. So don't ever neglect to apply that principle and come to the Lord as a little child and just say, Lord, You teach me.

Open my eyes. Show Yourself. Make the Bible live.

You don't study the Bible to know the Bible. You don't study Matthew to know Matthew. Romans to know Romans.

God has given us His Word that we might know Him, that we might know the Lord, and He desires that we come to the Bible with hearts that want to know Him. And He honors that and every time. How thankful I am for that principle.

I'd be a dead man without that principle. The Lord is the only one that can open the Scripture. So let's pray and trust Him together.

Father, thank You so much for Your precious Word. Thank You that You've put a Bible teacher in our heart to live within us and to search the depths of God and to show us the things of Christ, to instruct us as to who we are in Him, to show us all the wonderful things that have been accomplished for us, to show us what You are doing in our lives and what we can expect as You conform us to Christ. Thank You for Your Word and now we ask You again to give us a living Word.

Show us the Savior through the written Word. Thank You for every chapter in the Bible. We know the Bible would be incomplete without each chapter.

We know our lives would be incomplete without Jonah chapter 3. We know that truth is in other places, but we ask You tonight to teach us, show us Christ from this precious portion of Scripture. Thank You in advance and we wait on You now. We pray for Your grace and Your strength and the attention that is not from man, that comes from You.

Work in us and we thank You in advance that You're going to meet with us. We ask again that You would visit us with Your salvation. We ask it in the precious and all-prevailing name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen. Well, I don't need to take too much time to review. It's so different, you know, when I come here because we have a concentrated session.

We're meeting together at home, you know. Everything's a week apart and a big part of my teaching has to do with review and bringing people up to date. But we're looking at this wonderful book of Jonah, the prophet of God, that God in mercy transformed and turned into a sign.

That's what we're looking at this weekend. And you remember when the story begins, Jonah is independent and wanting to do his own thing, resisting the Lord, and he flees from the presence of the Lord. The commission he had received went contrary to his thinking.

He had a non-missionary heart and an anti-missionary heart. God wanted to use him as a missionary channel, but he wasn't ready. And the whole book of Jonah shows us how God made him ready.

And of course, it lays down the great principles on how God always turns his child into a sign. I suggested that there are wonderfully illustrated in the four chapters of Jonah, four changes that God works in our heart as he turns us into a sign. We've already looked at a couple of those.

In chapter 1, we saw God pursue, chase down his independent child by every mean. He hurled a storm into his life and brought certain people into his life, people with less light than him. By his mercy, he used even Jonah in his condition until finally God chased him to the place where he was willing to sacrifice his

life for the sake of others.

Chapter 1, verse 12, he said to them, pick me up and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you. I know on account of me, this great storm has come upon you.

And so he was finally willing to be thrown overboard. There's still a lot of Jonah in Jonah, even at this point in his life. It was a noble thing on the level of the Phoenician mariners to see.

It was brave, it was courageous, and they were thankful that he was willing to sacrifice his life for them. But as we tried to show, as wonderful as that is, and as important in a first step, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to sacrifice your life for the sake of others, to be willing to lay down your own comforts and your life for the sake of others. Others don't need your life.

They need His life, and so the work must go on. That's an important step, to surrender all. But having surrendered all, God begins to work His deeper work.

And what He didn't accomplish through the storm, He then begins in a deeper way to accomplish through the fish. And you remember we looked at that for three days and three nights. God used that experience to put Jonah in the shoes of the heathen.

His attitude was, Because I don't want to bring the message to them. They don't deserve it. They deserve judgment.

God brought him to the place where he knew that he also deserved the judgment of God and didn't deserve the mercy of God. God put him on level ground with everyone. We all need the mercy of the Lord.

There's no difference. There's no difference. Someone might express their need in a greater way and be involved and entangled in things that others have been delivered from.

But we all need the mercy of the Lord. And finally, in that fish, he understands how much he needs God's mercy. And he cries out in 2.9, salvation is from the Lord.

That's the lesson he learned in the fish. We saw him in the fish turn his heart toward the temple and toward the Lord again. He had run from God's presence, but now he had tasted exactly, he was in the shoes of the heathen.

And then when he said that, God said in verse 10, the Lord commanded the fish and it vomited Jonah onto the dry land. God surprised Jonah with resurrection. He wasn't expecting that.

He thought it was over when he went sailing through the air and hit the water. That's the end. That was my dedication.

That's my life. I give my life. But God has a great surprise for him and now he stands again on God's good earth with a life that's not his own, a supernatural life, a miracle life, a new man and a new creation.

And here he is the recipient of the undeserved mercy of God and he stands a man raised from the dead. This evening I'd like to take us to that next step, chapter 3 of Jonah. After God brings us to the place of surrender and after God takes us to the place where we're able to embrace the pure grace of God, salvations of the Lord, he turns, he transforms Jonah into a sign.

And that's what I'd like us to look at this evening. Resurrection life. I'd like to read again the word that our Lord Jesus recorded in Luke chapter 11, just two verses.

Verse 29 and 30. As the crowds were increasing, he began to say, this generation's a wicked generation. It seeks after a sign and yet no sign will be given except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

For just as Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites, so will the Son of Man be to this generation. Jesus not only said that Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites and that that was the persuasive cause of their repentance, but he also said that the sign of Jonah would be the only sign that he would ever give to a wicked sign-seeking generation. Not only to the Ninevites, but our Lord Jesus said there will never be another sign.

Only one sign, the sign of Jonah. And that's why it's so important in my heart this weekend that we all lay hold of the truth. God wants to make you a sign.

And God wants to make you a sign. That's mission. And we're going to see it illustrated in this marvelous, marvelous book.

Thousands of Christians are in process. God is working that in them. And they're still in the storm process and in the fish process and so on.

But the Lord is faithful. Now, before we look at chapter three, there's a couple of things I want to sweep away. Chapter three raises two questions that in some minds have caused some difficulty.

Theological problems. Now, I've only met one person in my life. That doesn't mean there aren't others.

I've only met one person in my life who thought that one of the problems in chapter three was a legitimate hang-up. In other words, there's some theological problems here, but they're not real hang-ups to most Christians. I've only met one person who thought it was a hang-up.

It's a curiosity, perhaps, but not really a hang-up. And for that reason, I don't want to take precious Joshua time to look at these particular problems. Let me just mention them to you.

The first one has to do with chapter 3.10, where the King James says, God repented, or God relented concerning the calamity. And some would say, now that looks like a contradiction in the Bible. God repented.

God changed. God turned around. 1 Samuel 15 and verse 29 says that He's not a man, that He should change.

And Malachi chapter 3, verse 6, I'm the Lord, I don't change. And so they think there's a conflict. I don't.

If you have a legitimate hang-up on that, then see one of the elders, and they'll straighten you out. By the way, if you want to study the doctrine of repentance, don't neglect Jonah. Because in seed form, you have the full teaching of repentance in the book of Jonah.

Because Nineveh repented, because Jonah repented, and because God repented. And when you see all of the principles involved there, you'll have the full teaching in seed form on repentance. But I don't want to deal with that now.

And then the other problem is introduced because of a verse in Matthew 12. And verse 40 said, Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so the Son of Man will be three days, three nights in the belly of the earth. And some people think that's a problem because Jesus died on Friday morning, or Friday afternoon.

He was on the cross on Friday morning. He rose on Sunday morning. Count the days.

How are you going to get three days and three nights out of that? And some people claim that they're hung up on that. All of these things are easily answered. But I don't want to take time now.

If you have a legitimate hang-up, see one of the elders on that, and they'll straighten you out on that. But I don't want to deal with that here. It's interesting, you know, but when we gather at a weekend like this, you don't want, I hope you don't want, to deal with those technicalities of cold theology.

I surely wouldn't want to give you that, and I'm sure you don't want it. So bless the Lord, so you elders are safe. I have another observation that's a little closer to the heart of God.

It's not quite Jonah chapter 3, but it's suggested at the beginning of Jonah chapter 3. And it's this glorious truth in verse 1, Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, I love that verse. That ought to be a plaque on a wall. Because it's the truth of restoration.

Isn't this a precious thing? You know the story of Jonah. And I don't know a more precious truth for the Christian than Jonah received, the word of the Lord came a second time. After what he had done, and after when he left the presence of the Lord, you talk about undeserved mercy of the Lord.

That God doesn't discard His child. He'll take him through death and resurrection, and then after he does his work, the word of the Lord came a second time unto him. One reason I want to call attention to that at all, is because when I was a new Christian, we were taught the exact opposite of that.

They put us on a tremendous guilt trip, and they told us, if we ever backslide, we're done. God will put us on a shelf, and He'll never use us again. And what a terrible thing that was in my early Christian life, because I didn't know anything, and I was messing up all the time.

And I kept feeling like God was going to put me on a shelf. And it's a great joy for me to be able to stand here in front of you, and declare without clearing my throat in an infragable way, God has no shelf. It's a glorious thing.

They used to quote us this little poem, and say, the bird with the broken wing never rises so high again. That's good poetry, but that's horrible theology. I'll tell you, it's a glorious thing to know.

The word of the Lord came a second time, and second implies third, and third implies fourth. It doesn't say like the last atom. It doesn't say second atom.

Because second would imply third, and there's no third atom. It's the last atom. But it didn't say the word came for the last time.

It came for the second time, implying a third time, and implying a fourth time, and so on. I'll tell you this, God is never done with you. God's never done with me.

God's never finished with His people. Over and over and over again, the word of the Lord's going to come to Him. And if He has to cast you down in a grave, and raise you up again, He'll do it.

And then the word of the Lord will come to you again. Elijah knew that truth. And David knew that truth.

And Peter knew that truth. John Mark knew that truth. Go through your Bible and look at those, that the word of the Lord came again.

The reality is, when He raises you up, He raises you up to greater usefulness, not less usefulness. But that's a subject all its own. Are you familiar with Howard Hendricks, from Dallas Theological Seminary? Heard him preaching one time on Elijah.

And he has a humorous way to present the truth. He was picturing this discouraged prophet, and he went to the Lord, and out in the field, he said, I quit! God said, What did you say? And he said, I resign! And God said, Spell it! And he said, R-E-S-I-G-N, I resign! And the word came out, Sounds like resign to me! Well, it's a great truth, that the word of the Lord came to him again. And God, in His grace, called him again, rebelling and running.

God didn't cast him off. And it's just a wonderful truth. I love to relate that.

A brother's got me into Psalm 23 here. And I love to relate some of these things to Psalm 23. The Lord is my shepherd, He restoreth my soul.

With a perfect restoration, He restoreth my soul. That's intro. Let's look, please, at chapter 3. Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I'm going to tell you.

And so Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city. A three days walk.

And Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk. And he cried out and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh will be overthrown. Then the people of Nineveh believed in God.

And they called a fast, and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them. When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe from him, and covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes. And he issued a proclamation.

And it said, In Nineveh, by the decree of the king and nobles, do not let man, beast, herd, or flock taste the thing. Do not let them eat or drink water. But both man and beast must be covered with sackcloth, and let men call earnestly on God, that each may turn from his wicked way, and from the violence which is in his hands.

Who knows? God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger, so that we will not perish. And when God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

I told you in the introduction lesson, that I thought one of the greatest moral miracles of all time was recorded in this chapter. This great turning of a half a million or more people to the Lord. One stranger comes in one day, and speaks from the record one sentence.

And what a sentence that! And they repent. Verse 2, the great city, a wicked city. I told you previously that I take the last verse, and the reference to 120,000 to be the infants.

And so if you multiply that by four or five, that's where you get over a half a million people. Half a million people turning to the Lord. I know this part isn't in the Bible, but I've read some of the descriptions of what Nineveh was like at that time.

I don't know if you're familiar with Dr. Charles Feinberg from Talbot Seminary, but he had some wonderful commentaries. And he gives some of the background of this. And he said this is an amazing city at that time.

It was one of the largest cities and most developed cities of the entire world at that time. There's another, Dr. Poussey, that has a wonderful commentary on this particular book. He has it on all the minor prophets, but I've only studied him from this one book.

And he says on the level of earth, there was never a city like this. It was unassailable. They didn't have one wall around it like Jericho had.

Well, actually Jericho had two walls. But they had five walls around the city. Five walls with great space in between and moats in between.

And each wall, he said, was a hundred feet high. And on the top of each wall there was space enough to run three chariots side by side. This is an unusual city.

And they were fortified. It was a tremendous city. Remarkable some of the stuff they dug up in the sciences and all that kind of thing.

You know where Nineveh is as far as geography is? It's Iraq. It's Iraq. That's where it was.

The capital of Assyria is Iraq. And even as there is today, there was then these many palaces all through the city of Assyria even in that day. And according to the records, there were 15 gates to the city.

And all around the outside wall there were 1,500 towers. And each tower was 200 feet high. And inside those walls in that magnificent city was a wicked, wicked people.

A violent people. I won't shock you with some of the descriptions I read of their sin. Perhaps you already know, but they were just a terrible, terrible people.

That's the city that turned to the Lord in a day. A half a million people. Glance, if you would, at verse 5 of chapter 3. The people of Nineveh believed in the Lord.

Glance again at verses 5-8. I won't take time to read it. But look at this repentance.

From the bum and the beggar in the street all the way up to the throne as Rick was sharing with us the other day. The king came down and took off his robe and sat in the ashes. They even put the animals.

Can you picture the sheep and the cows and the goats? In sackcloth. And the animals weren't allowed to eat. It's one thing for a man to fast, but how are you going to get these animals to stop eating? This was a tremendous turning unto the Lord.

I read one commentator that said, sad, but their repentance was unreal. Unreal. He said it was all form because it was a heathen repentance.

There was no temple. There was no altar. There was no lamb.

There was no blood. There was no priest. It was a heathen repentance and so it was unreal.

Well, I know this. You can't fool God. And the Bible says God said it was real.

You might be able to fool Jonah. You can sure fool something over on me. But you can't fool God.

You can't fool the Lord. Verse 10, When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked ways, then God relented concerning the calamity. And you can't fool Jesus, who is God.

In the New Testament, in chapter 12 of Matthew, He said they repented at the preaching of Jonah. It was a real repentance. My half a million people in reality turned to the Lord.

What a moral miracle that is. Well, the question begs to be answered. What happened? How in the world did that happen? That these wicked people, a half a million of them, turned around.

Someone said it was Jonah's preaching. His powerful sermon. Verse 2, Arise, go to Nineveh the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I will tell you.

It looks like Jonah was very restricted by God in what he said and was allowed to say. It reminded me very much of God's Word to Moses when He had to build the tabernacle. And you'll see why when we go through this chapter.

Don't add to it. Don't subtract from it. Because I'm planning to use this as a picture down the road.

And so Jonah was under strict orders. And according to verse 3, Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the Word of the Lord. He obeyed the Lord.

And he lined up with God's restrictions. You say, well, what did he preach? Well, the record we have is in verse 4. Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk. And he cried out and said, Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be overthrown.

I used to think that that meant you have 40 days to repent. And if you don't repent by 40 days, on the 41st day, you're going to get incinerated. That's what I thought it meant.

But the Hebrew language won't allow that. That's not at all what it means after 40 days it will be overthrown. What it literally says is this.

By the 40th day, it's over. By the 40th day, it's already overthrown and an ash heap. In other words, they had no clue when the fire would fall.

All they knew for sure was by the 40th day, the whole city would have been finally destroyed. Would the fire fall on the second day? Would it fall on the 15th day? The 25th day? The 39th day? They didn't know.

You see, by that method, God was able to preserve the truth that behold, today is the day of salvation.

They didn't know when it was going to come. And He deliberately left it uncertain. Chapter 3, verse 4, says that Jonah went one day's walk.

But chapter 3, verse 3, says it takes three days to get through the city. And what did he do? Quit? How come he didn't go all three days and go all through the city? I believe part of it has to do with the fact that he was under orders to speak exactly what I say. Don't add to it.

Don't subtract from it. And what was his message? You have 40 days and then it will be overthrown. He couldn't preach the next day.

You know why? He'd have to change the message. He'd have to say, you have 39 days and you'll be overthrown. He wasn't allowed to do that.

And 38 days and he'll be overthrown. And 37 days. So he went one day and he waited for a word from God.

There was no word. He's done. He's done.

And he gave the message as God gave it. The message Jonah preached, you notice, was 100% judgment. There's not a word of mercy in that message, in that sentence.

There's not a sentence of grace. There's not a syllable of hope in what Jonah said. Jonah was not allowed to say, if you repent, however.

He didn't say that. He didn't say, if you turn to the Lord, if from the king down to the beggar, you will put yourself in sackcloth and repent. If you'll turn from your wicked ways, he gave no ifs.

There were no conditions in this message whatsoever. He didn't say, God will have mercy. He didn't say, God will forgive.

He just said, within 40 days, Nineveh will be overthrown. That's it. Not a word about forgiveness.

Not a word about salvation. Not a word about repentance. Not a word about turning.

Don't be too hard on Jonah. Say, well, what a man. He still is anti-missionary and non-missionary.

He just wants them judged. And he's just going to preach judgment. That might be part of it because God deals with us where we are.

But the other part is this. He was under restrictions from heaven saying, only preach what I tell you. And I'm going to show you why it's so important that he could not put grace in that sermon.

In a couple of minutes, I'll explain that. The Ninevites, according to the record, did repent at the preaching of Jonah. But there had to be something else that would turn a half a million people to the Lord.

I don't think Jonah could ever stand up and say, what a sermon I preached that day. You should have heard me preach. He didn't even have three points in a poem.

What kind of a sermon is that? There was no hope in his message. What made thousands of people line the aisles and come forward to use an expression we're familiar with? There's nothing in his words at all to comfort only terror from the Lord. It was spiritually important for the picture that God was planning, like He planned the tabernacle, the earthly to picture the heavenly.

Jonah was a picture. He didn't know God was writing a Bible using him as a pencil. He had no clue God was doing this.

When he went down in the fish, he didn't say, oh, now it's time to picture Christ in His death. He didn't know God was doing that. And now God says, I want you to say only this, nothing else.

It's important to the message of the book. It's important to the truth of the sign. It's important to the message of the Gospel.

And so he goes out and he preaches that. Although Jonah, what he preached, his message was certain, deserved judgment within 40 days. When you read the record, you scratch your head because you say, they did have hope.

Where'd they get it? Look in verse 9. The king says in his proclamation, who knows? God may relent and withdraw His burning anger from us so that we will not perish. In those two words, who knows? There's hope. Somehow they said, maybe.

Where'd they get that? Perhaps God won't. Maybe He won't. Who knows? I know this.

They didn't get it from the words that came out of the mouth of Jonah. Wherever they got hope, it wasn't from his mouth. Now I see a hint of mercy in the second commission.

But how would they know about that? In the first commission, in chapter 1, verse 2, God said, Arise, go to Nineveh, cry against it. That's judgment. But the second time, He didn't say cry against it.

You notice in the second commission, in chapter 3, verse 2, He said, Proclaim to it the proclamation which I will tell you. Well, changing it from cry against it to proclaim what I tell you, there might be hope in that, but I don't see how Nineveh would have known about that commission. Maybe they got it out of His words in verse 4. Yet forty days.

Maybe they thought something like this. There's mercy there. God didn't have to give us any time at all.

He didn't have to say forty days. And maybe the fact that He mentioned forty days, maybe that's where they got mercy. You know, the Bible says in Proverbs 29 that a man who hardens his neck repeatedly will suddenly be reprovved without remedy.

You don't have to be a Bible scholar to go through your Bible and know sometime judgment came without warning. And God just came down and they didn't give warning. Herod's in the middle of a sermon in the book of Acts and all of a sudden, God strikes him down.

Ananias and Sapphira, they didn't get a warning first. And so on. And so maybe when He said forty days, they said, we've got time.

We've got time. Maybe in verse 2, in this second commission, Arise, go to Nineveh. The fact that Jonas showed up at all, they might have reasoned mercy from that.

They might have said, if He's planning to incinerate us, why does He go through the trouble of sending us a prophet? Why send a preacher if He's planning just to destroy us? What good is it to know that we're going down if there's not a possibility of repentance? So maybe they got mercy out of all that. But here's what we know for sure. Our Lord Jesus comes out and tells us in clear words what caused them to repent.

I've quoted it many times. Let me quote it again. Luke 11, 30.

Jonah became a sign to the Ninevites. It wasn't only what they heard. But somehow there was in Jonah a sign.

And that's where they got their hope. A sign points to something. What is a sign? What is this? Jonah became a sign.

Perhaps in your study you've read what greatly disappointed me, especially when I found out some of the respected scholars that hold this position. But they said Jonah was a sign because after three days and three nights in the belly of the fish, the stomach acids of the fish did a job on him and bleached him completely white. And that was the sign.

He showed up bleached from the stomach acids of the fish. And they get that because some people have actually been swallowed alive, have been rescued, and that's what they look like. And so they say, well, that's exactly what happened.

I'm disappointed, I say, in some of the commentators that hold that. I won't name some of their names, but I think you'd be shocked at some of them. I think it militates against what our Lord Jesus was saying in Matthew.

In Matthew He says, a wicked generation seeks the sign. I'm not going to give you something that will convince you with these eyes. And if He showed up all bleached white, that would have been a call to vision rather than a call and an invitation to faith.

And so I don't think that's what it means that Jonah is a sign. And besides, that would tone down the miracle, I think. And then behold, God raised him partially digested.

Just something about that miracle that doesn't do it for me. How was Jonah a sign? Well, you say, Jonah was a sign in his testimony. No question about that.

I think it's pretty obvious, though I can't tell you how. If you want to know how, come to the elders later and they'll tell you how. But somehow, it seems like the Ninevites knew the story of Jonah by the time he got there.

I don't know exactly how they knew, but somehow they knew about the whole story. Someone says, well, the mariners told them. Well, the mariners were Phoenician and I don't know how they'd go to Nineveh.

Maybe they did tell them in some way. I don't know. That a man came out alive from this fish.

That's a possibility. Someone says, well, we don't have the full record here. We have one sentence.

But maybe Jonah also gave his testimony as he spoke. I don't incline to that because I'm pretty sure God was very restrictive in what He said. We don't know how He knew.

We don't know how much time passed between the first and the second commission. Was it six months later? Was it a year later or a couple of years later? There's only one time the Bible mentions that trip, that distance from Jerusalem to Iraq. Of course, if then it wasn't Assyria, Babylon would have been involved.

But that trip, Ezra took that trip. And then it took him six months just to make the trip. But of course, he was with others.

So we don't know exactly how much time. And then there's that interesting historical reference in 2 Kings chapter 15. Same period of time.

And Assyria, going out on all of their campaigns out to destroy nations. Assyria attacks Israel. And it looks like it's in between the calls.

God says, Arise, go to Nineveh, all the fish and all that. And then Jonah goes home. And we know he went back home because the second commission, the Bible comes again, says, Arise and go to Nineveh.

He wasn't in Nineveh. He was at home. And in between the two, it looks like Assyria actually made a raid on Israel.

Well, if Assyria and the soldiers came to Israel, they might have got some news about what was happening. Read the record. It's a strange thing.

They left awful fast out of Israel. They got paid off. They paid them in silver and said, Don't attack us.

And it worked and they left. But maybe there they heard the story. I don't know how they knew.

Certainly this is a book of miracles. God could have done a miracle to let them know. You know, He could have done that easily.

Give them a vision. Give them a dream. I don't know how they knew.

But somehow they knew. Matthew 12, 40, Just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. And the point of the three days and three nights is not three days and three nights.

The point of that is not four, not five, not more than three. It not only is a picture of death, but it's a picture of resurrection. That was His testimony.

And somehow they knew it. Here's a man raised from the dead. Here's a man standing before us alive that was as good as dead.

And they knew somehow that He was an object lesson of God's mercy. Because they knew the story, they knew this guy standing in front of us who's given us this message. He doesn't deserve to be alive.

It's only by the mercy of God He's standing here. That's where they got their hope. They say, maybe if God had mercy on that scoundrel, maybe He'll have mercy on me, on us.

And Jonah became a sign. Jonah's only hope was God's salvation and they thought, that's our only hope. Now the sign is not in what Jonah said and in what Jonah did.

The sign is the testimony. Yeah, but it's deeper than that. It's deeper than that.

When you look at one of the greatest moral miracles in the history of mankind that's half a million people, if you study like I study and you try to understand the heart of God and put the Scriptures together, God has given us one of the greatest repentances of all time. And I read the record and I say, where's the Gospel? Where's the blood? I hate the idea that a half a million people came to Christ and I don't see the blood. Where's the Lamb of God? Where's the atonement in this great repentance? If you read it just with these eyes in a cursory way, it looks like a salvation by works.

All you have to do is repent and put on sackcloth and ashes and fast and then God will forgive you. And I know that's not the truth of the Bible. And I read this and I say, this greatest repentance in the history of the world and I can't find Jesus.

I can't find the blood. I can't find the atonement. I know salvation is not by works.

I know it's not by repentance and turning from your sin. That's not salvation. God is writing a story and God is giving a sign.

I'm going to ask you to stand back with me and we're going to look again at the same record. But this time think in a spiritual way. What is God doing? There's two parts to the Gospel as you know.

One part is sadly neglected today among God's people. And that's the side that He preached. The judgment side.

People aren't talking about hell these days. People aren't talking about the wrath of God and God's holy character and the stern necessity for God to judge sin. People aren't mentioning that.

It used to be the talk that before you can get a person saved, you've got to get them lost. And that's all those old Puritans and what they used to do. And they'd get them lost.

Good and lost. And that's where the Quakers came from. They got them so lost they'd quake.

And they'd be afraid. And then they'd come along and give them the Gospel. The truth about the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, the Ninevites had a full Gospel in seed form. The wrath of God they had illustrated in the Sermon of Jonah. Unmitigated wrath.

You deserve hell. It's coming. God's going to judge.

And that's all they knew. The wrath of God. In the Sermon of Jonah they had part one of the Gospel.

In the person of Jonah. In the sign. They had part two.

The death. The burial. And the resurrection.

In seed form. There's the cross. Everything is there.

And Jonah became Christ to them. Where they were, that's all they had. They looked over here and they said, we're dead.

They looked at Him and said, here is our only hope. And Jonah became Jesus for them. Picture of this death and burial and resurrection of Christ.

They looked at Jonah and they saw Christ, their only hope, and they said, that's our salvation. What's the sign of Jonah? The sign of Jonah. Someone says, it's His testimony.

It's deeper than that. They say, it's the resurrection life. That's the doctrine of it.

The sign of Jonah is Jesus. It's the life of God. It's the life of the Lord.

This man was raised from the dead by a life not His own. It's more than His testimony. It's more than some doctrine about the resurrection life.

It's a man being indwelt by God. That's the testimony. Why is there such power in a person that God has raised from the dead? In a person that God has come and done a wonderful work and Christ is being manifest in his life? You find some converted drunkard or some converted drug addict or some converted pervert or some self-righteous person that's been reduced and has come to the Lord.

Someone else stands up with his fancy seminary degree and he stands up there because he's got all of these diplomas and endorsements from famous Christians and so on like that. And yet this nobody on whom God has done a work. These kids that go out in the field and just live.

And somebody comes along and they see Christ. That's the sign. When they see Christ, that's the sign of Jonah.

Christ alive. Jonah did nothing to be made a sign. He didn't pray.

He didn't fast. He didn't study. He didn't read how-to books.

He never ordered a tape from me. God did it all. God chased him down to the place where he would surrender all.

God brought him down to the depths where he would say, it's all by grace. God raised him up again where he would stand in a life not his own. Jonah didn't go through the streets of Nineveh working miracle after miracle as some credential that he was divinely sent.

He was the miracle. That was the sign. God raised him up and Christ was being seen in his life.

And when they see Christ, that's the sign of Jonah. And he said, I'm not going to give another sign. That's the only sign.

I'll work with a man, I'll work with a woman, a young person, and I'll conform them and I'll change them until Christ is seen. And once Christ is seen, things begin to happen. And that's when all of it started to happen.

The sign is Christ. When He shines in you, when He shines in me, that's the power of the Lord. I told you that there's only one missionary in all the universe.

And that's the Lord. The Lord wanted to go to Nineveh. And He finally got to go in His servant, Jonah.

And it's Christ that went to Nineveh. And they heard the full Gospel. They heard that there was judgment and they saw hope in this one person.

A transformed person radiating Christ. See, Jonah, he was a successful prophet up in the north long before he was assigned. He had preached and things came to pass.

But after he was raised from the dead and after Christ began to live in him, we're going to look at some of that tomorrow, but oh, the fruit. It's not what you say, Jonah. It's not what you do.

It's who you are. What God has made you. Brothers and sisters in Christ, that's missions.

Christ in you. God's life wins the world. It doesn't matter in the final analysis how pretty your fancy charts are or how you can answer doctrinal questions or what board is behind your back or who endorses you.

To the degree Christ lives in you, to that degree you're assigned. To the degree Christ lives in me, to that degree I'm assigned. Nineveh saw Christ.

You can't make up other things by adding other things or doing other things. You can't make up the lack of life. If Christ is not there, there's no amount of cleverness.

There's no amount of eloquence. There's no amount of Christian experience. There's no amount of genius that you can add to it.

There's no amount of organization or resources or volunteers. Nothing can substitute Christ. And you can have all the programs in the world to reach all the people in the world.

And I'll tell you, they're going to fall dead. You find somebody, anybody, a humble child, if somebody sees Christ, there's a change. They look at that, that's the sign of Jonah.

Now, we need to... Tomorrow is very important. You know, how can a man rise from the dead and still have the attitude Jonah had? We need to deal with that. And we're going to look at that tomorrow.

But brothers and sisters in Christ, I think you've come too far. You already know this. You probably don't need to hear it.

But I'm going to tell you anyway, just to discharge my burden. Don't go out and try to become a sign. Don't go out and try to become a sign.

How did Jonah become a sign? God worked in him. Let God work in you. Let God deliver you.

Let God set you free. Let God raise you from the dead. Let God conform you to Christ.

And you're becoming a sign. Occupy yourself with Christ. Don't worry about the mission field.

Occupy with Christ. And God will make the sign. Let God work in you.

Then show up. That's missions. That's the whole story.

That's what Jonah did. That's what Lazarus did. It said people flocked because God raised them from the dead.

Just let the Lord work in you. Christ will begin to conform you to Himself. And as Christ is seen, you'll be amazed.

And we're going to look at it tomorrow. You'll be amazed. You don't even begin to know how many people will turn to the Lord just because you're you.

And you live. And they can see Christ in you. You know.

You could give testimony. I could get down. You could come up.

Row after row after row. And you can testify. Somebody saw Christ in me and I can't believe.

And these kids, the way they were taught, it was amazing. It was marvelous. It was a tremendous thing to see.

They saw Christ. They saw Christ. Oh, that God would give us the sign of Jonah.

It's not hard. People scratch their heads. What's the sign of Jonah? What's the sign of Jonah? It's Jesus.

Of course you know we're going to end up there. That's why we gathered here. To see Him.

That's the sign of Jonah. And may God make us into His sign. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You so much for this marvelous testimony that You gave. And You allowed Jonah to be Christ for the Ninevites. And they turned in the masses to the Lord.

Allow us to be Christ for You where we are. Oh, we praise You, Lord, for this wonderful Gospel. You raise us up from the dead and give us a life not our own.

And that life is the attraction. You've told us that if you be lifted up, You'll draw all men, not just the Greeks, but the whole world to You. Will You be lifted up in our lives, we pray, in Jesus' name.

Amen.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/11/SID11412.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/ed-miller/jonah-4-how-god-makes-us-into-a-sign/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net