

Life Lessons From the Life of Jonah

by Israel Wayne

The sermon explores the sovereignty of God through the life of Jonah, highlighting God's mercy and compassion towards those who don't deserve it.

Duration: 39:37

Scripture: Psalm 103:8-10, Daniel 4:34-36, Jonah 3:4, Jonah 4:1-4, Matthew 12:39-41

Topics: "Gods Sovereignty", "Divine Mercy"

Description

This sermon delves into the sovereignty of God through the life lessons of Jonah, exploring the questions God asks individuals to challenge their assumptions and understand His nature. It emphasizes the need to grasp the balance of God's justice, love, mercy, and holiness to comprehend His sovereignty fully, urging gratitude and mercy towards others. The narrative of Jonah's reluctance, anger, and God's compassion towards Nineveh serves as a profound illustration of God's sovereignty and mercy.

Transcript

Good evening. I'm going to be sharing with you tonight on the topic of the sovereignty of God, life lessons from the life of Jonah in the scriptures. This is drawn from a new book that I have written, which is entitled Questions God Asks.

Questions God Asks. This book is on the press right now. If you have a Kindle or you read books on a tablet of some kind, an iPad or something like that, you can download it.

It's already available on Amazon.com, but we have some cards back at the table that you can pick up if you're interested in getting the print edition. The print edition is going to be coming out in just like two weeks, so I'm really excited about that. But this book, I ended up writing it over a span of, I'm not sure exactly even how long, but I'm going to say maybe five years.

And it came about as a result of my own study of the scriptures. I was going through the Old Testament. I noticed many places in scripture where God would ask someone a question.

He asked many questions of different people. He asked Adam, where are you? He asked Cain, where is your brother? He asked Elijah in the cave, what are you doing here? He asked Joshua, why are you on your face? He asked Moses, what is in your hand? And so many of these questions that he would ask people, Abraham, where is your wife? And it just puzzled me in a way that God would ask a question

because one of the doctrines that we know to be true about the nature and character of God is his omniscience. That means that God knows everything.

There's nothing that is outside the scope of God's knowledge. So why would a God who knows everything ask a question? Obviously if he's asking the question, it's not for his benefit. It's not as though when he asks Adam in the garden, where are you, that he's lost track of him.

It's not as though somehow his GPS tracking device that he had put on Adam has failed to work and now he doesn't know where he is. Or when he asks Cain, where is your brother, that he's lost track of Abel. The question is obviously not there for God's benefit.

The question is there then for the benefit and on the behalf of the person who is being asked the question. There's something that God wants them to think about. There's something that he wants them to consider.

He wants them to question their assumptions. And I want to look at a question that God asks the prophet Jonah. But I want to give a little bit of background to it first.

Have you ever noticed that there are many people who claim to be atheists, they say they don't believe in God, and yet when some national tragedy happens, when there is a tornado or an earthquake or a tsunami and people die, immediately what they do is they begin to rail against this God that supposedly they don't believe in. It's very odd to me how angry, how violently angry they are against a deity that supposedly they have no belief in. I don't know about you, but I have never become angry at the tooth fairy.

And yet people get angry at this God, and of course I believe that that's because Romans one says that God has revealed himself through creation and that everyone everywhere intuitively in their hearts, they know that there is a God. But it's more a question of, not so much that they don't believe in God, but that they don't like God. They're angry at God.

And the question then is, do these atheists, these unbelievers, do they have a right to be angry at God? Well they feel that they do. They feel that they have a right to be angry at God because God has not orchestrated this world, this universe the way that they would like. And if you think about it, what they would like is they would like for everything to go their way all the time.

They would like to win the lottery every other day. They would like to have perfect health. They would like for everything in life to work out in a way that benefits them.

And when that doesn't happen, when something upsets the apple cart of their life, they can't handle it. They can't deal with it. So in essence, it seems like what some of these people want is, they want a God who is big enough to solve all of their problems, heal all their illnesses, send them all the money that they could possibly want, end world hunger and famine and all.

They want a God that's that big, but they want a God that's small enough that he'll do what he's told. And that he will jump when they tell him to. And that they can control this God.

They want it both ways. They want a God that's huge and small all at the same time. This is a really difficult issue that people struggle with, this issue of the sovereignty of God.

And theologians have wrestled over this for centuries. And I will reassure you that we won't completely solve Romans 9 tonight. And the good thing is I don't have to, because you can have that solved for you completely, I'm sure, in the upcoming weeks as you continue to study about it here in this church.

But when we look at this profile of the runaway prophet Jonah, he's an interesting character. He is the son of Amittai, whose name means truth. His father's name was Truth.

Now that tells me something about his grandparents. His grandparents named his father Truth. It's a good name for the father of a prophet.

And it occurs to me that this man comes from a lineage of faith, and a lineage of faithfulness. He is active in ministry during the time of Jeroboam II, which is approximately from 786 to 746 BC. He comes from this little town called Gathpepher, which is just a few miles north of Nazareth, where Jesus grew up.

And he's told to go and preach against the city of Nineveh. Now Nineveh is a great ancient city. It was the home of the Assyrians.

And this city was built, the scripture tells us, in Genesis chapter 10, right around the time of the Tower of Babel. That was when this great city began to be built. We are told in the King James Version that a man named Asher, A-S-S-H-U-R, built this city of Nineveh.

We are told by some of the other translations that it was Nimrod who built this city of Nineveh. Later on in the history of the Assyrians, their deity is called Asher, A-S-H-U-R. At any rate, this city of Nineveh, from its very inception, from what we can tell from history and even indications from the scripture, was built as a city that was probably in rebellion against God.

But it was a great city. It had a population of 120,000 people, which at this time was huge. The scripture tells us that it had a span of about three days' width.

That it would take you about three days to go across from one edge of town to the other edge of town. I mean, this was an empire. Nineveh had one of the greatest libraries in all of ancient history.

And he's told to go and preach against this city of Nineveh. Now, the location of it today is near Mosul in modern day Iraq. That's where the city is.

Jonah didn't want to go there. He didn't want to go to the ancient city of Iraq. Because he didn't like the people there.

He had a bias against them. He was discriminated against them. And in some ways, you might be able to believe that his bias against these Ninevites was justified.

Let me just share with you something that's recorded in the Assyrian War Bulletin. Which is one of their ancient documents that dates back to about 1000 BC. This is what they recorded about what they would do when they go to war.

And I'll preface this by saying this is very graphic. But I'm going to share it just because I want you to get the true understanding of the type of people that these Assyrians were. This Assyrian War Bulletin tells of the enemies of the Assyrians being impaled on stakes.

They would flay their nobles, spreading their skin out on piles. They would burn them on fires, cut off their limbs, noses, ears, and fingers. They would often put out the eyes of the prisoners.

Or they would make pyramids of their heads. That's what type of people these Assyrians were. Not nice.

So when Jonah gets this assignment that you're supposed to go and preach against the city of Nineveh. He knows their reputation. He knows what type of people they are.

And I'm sure he has two thoughts. Number one, those things that I've read that they do to other people, they're going to do those things to me. No thank you.

I think the second thought that he had was, I don't know if people like that can be saved. They're too bad. They're too horrible.

They don't deserve to be saved. They deserve to be punished. So what he does is instead of going north into the land of the Assyrians, he hops a boat in the Mediterranean.

And he heads west to Joppa, which at that time is the end of the world. So he goes to Joppa. I'm sorry.

He goes to Joppa. He catches a boat for Tarshish, which is on the other side of the Mediterranean. He's trying to get as far away from this assignment as he possibly can.

Of course, you know the story. You know about how he went on this boat, and there's a storm that comes up, and the men approach him. And they ask him if he knows anything about this.

And he says, yeah, I do. It's actually about me. I'm running away from God.

And they say, oh dear. You're doing what? And they don't want to throw him overboard. But he says, it's the only way you're going to appease God.

He's angry at me. You're going to have to throw me overboard. And they try to find ways to avoid that.

They lighten the cargo of their ship, but nothing's working. And so essentially, they decide that they have no choice, and they throw him overboard. And as we know, he is swallowed by this great fish, this great sea monster that comes up and swallows him whole.

There have been a lot of people, historians over time, who have said, well, we don't believe that this Jonah was a real historical character. I mean, this is a pretty far-fetched story about a man being swallowed by a fish. Is that for real? I mean, could that even happen? Well, interestingly, apparently Jesus thought it could happen.

Because Jesus mentions this in Matthew 12, 39 through 41, where he talks to the Pharisees. And he says, you want a miraculous sign, but no sign is going to be given you except for the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a sea monster or a great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

So the men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah. And behold, something or someone greater than Jonah is here. So Jesus believed that Jonah was a real historical person, and this event actually happened.

My view is if Jesus thought it happened, well, I think it happened too. So they throw him overboard, and as you know, he spends three days and three nights in the belly of this great fish or this great creature of the deep. And at the end of that time, he is regurgitated out onto the land.

He prays a prayer in this time of captivity there. And he gets up, and after he is vomited by the great fish, he heads off to Nineveh. What's interesting is that he doesn't actually tell the people of Nineveh to repent.

What he says is this. This is in Jonah 3, verse 4. He says, Yet 40 days, and Nineveh will be overthrown. That's his message.

He goes throughout the city declaring this. Yet 40 days, and Nineveh will be overthrown. Now do you think he might have been a little bit happy about the outcome of that? I think he was.

I think he was really hopeful that that was going to happen. He's not asking them to repent. I think he's halfway hoping that they won't.

But then something turns in the story that he doesn't expect. He's been given the commission to go preach against the city. He goes.

He preaches against the city. But something happens. It changes.

God doesn't send judgment. The king humbles himself. He calls for fasting.

He calls for humility. They humble themselves in sackcloth and ashes, and they say, Maybe this God will relent. Maybe he won't bring this disaster down upon us.

And God relents. This is hard for Jonah to deal with. God has been merciful to people who have shown no mercy.

It doesn't make any sense to Jonah. Jonah does not like these people. He does not like these Assyrians.

You know, when people ask the question, Why do bad things happen to good people? In Jonah's day and time, it was almost always the Assyrians who were doing the bad things to the good people. And Jonah just doesn't like the outcome of this. So, Jonah chapter 4, verses 1 through 4. But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry.

He prayed to the Lord and said, Please, Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? Therefore, in order to forestall this, I fled to Tarshish. For I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving kindness, one who relents concerning calamity. He's angry about this.

He is really mad at God. He's not saying this in thankfulness. He's saying this in anger and hostility.

In fact, he says next, Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life. In other words, it would be better for me if I died right now. He's that mad.

And the Lord said, Do you have good reason to be angry? Do you do well to be angry? One translation puts it. Do you have a right to be angry, Jonah? This question comes to Jonah. Do you have a right to be angry? Jonah believes that he does have a right to be angry.

It's ironic for us as humans that we want God's mercy for us. But we want God's judgment and his justice for the other guy. That's our human nature.

God is the perfect balance of mercy and justice. We're almost always completely out of balance on this issue. We expect God to be completely lenient toward us.

To let us off the hook. To let us not face any of the consequences of our decisions. We want God to be easy on us.

We want God to be hard on the bad guys. To be hard on those people who have done wrong to us. We want God to act in vengeance.

It's an inconsistency in us. We're like the unmerciful servant. We're shown much grace.

We're shown much mercy. And what do we do? We go and we take our hands, spiritually speaking, and try to put them around the throat of somebody else who has been imperfect toward us. It's the hypocrisy of our humanness.

So Joseph, wrong guy. So Jonah goes out to the east side of the city. And he sets up a little tent out there, a little shelter, to see what's going to happen to the city.

He's sitting out there to watch. He's going to wait out the 40 days just in case the fire falls from heaven like it did on Sodom and Gomorrah. And those Assyrians get what they have coming to them.

So the Lord caused this leafy plant to spring up and cover Jonah and give him shade from the sun. And Jonah liked this plant very much. There's probably a very practical reason why Jonah liked this plant, providing shade from the heat of the scorching desert sun.

If you think about, physically speaking, what would happen to your skin if you were digested in the belly of a great fish for three days, your skin would become very sensitive to the rays of the sun. And this covering of this plant was very comforting to him. In one of the more benign arguments of church history, Jerome and Augustine argued over whether this was a vine or whether it was a gourd.

They couldn't agree on it. Augustine said that it was a gourd. Jerome said it was probably a kind of ivy.

And, of course, these are the things that split churches and caused denominations to grow. You have the ivy people and the ivy church and the gourd church and can't talk to each other at the restaurant, that kind of thing. But whatever the nature of the plant, it was a great encouragement, a great help, comfort to Jonah on a practical level.

But then the very next day, God caused a worm to eat the plant and the plant withered. And then God brought a scorching east wind and the hot sun to beat down on Jonah. In other words, he's making it physically uncomfortable for Jonah.

And Jonah became angry again. And it says in Jonah 4.8 that he became faint and he begged with all his soul to die, saying, death is better to me than life. He seems a little overdramatic, doesn't he? I mean, he's really worked up.

He is really cooked about this thing. Have you known people who were that angry at God? This is a man who is not unfamiliar with the ways of the Lord. He's a prophet.

He's a prophet of God. But he is really upset with God. Maybe you found yourself in a place at some time in your life where you were angry with God.

Something that he did or something that he allowed did not make sense to you. It wasn't the way that you would have written the script. You wouldn't have told the story that way.

You would not have allowed that tragedy, that death, that illness, the loss of that job, that relational breakdown. You would not have allowed that. And in your mind, you can't quite reconcile how an all-powerful, all-loving God could allow something like that to happen in your life.

So why does God ask him this question? The question isn't there for God's benefit. The question is there for Jonah's benefit. Do you have a right to be angry? Why are you so angry? The issue is this.

Jonah has just been spared from the very depths of death. God has brought him back from the lowest point that he could possibly have ever been in his life, where he was without hope. If God did not come through for him, he had nothing.

He was redeemed and saved from the belly of that sea creature by the grace of God, by the mercy and the leniency of God. But instead of being thankful, he finds himself being angry that these other people didn't get what they have coming to them. The Lord says this to him in Jonah 4, 10-11.

Then the Lord said, You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not work, and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals? These people need grace too. And I'll be honest with you.

I struggle with this. I think we all do. Sometimes you turn on the news media and you hear about someone who has committed a horrible, violent crime, sometimes against innocent people, perhaps against children.

And we just think, that's so wrong. They deserve the worst kind of punishment that we could ever dish out. I remember hearing a story on the news within the last year of an abortion doctor and his staff who had been arrested and they were facing trial because there were children who survived abortions and they killed these children even after they were born.

These doctors just committed infanticide. They killed these infants. And I remember hearing the responses of Christians, people who claimed to be redeemed by God's grace, saying, I hope they rot in hell.

Christians saying that about this abortion doctor and about his staff. I could understand their anger. I could understand their being upset about someone who could take the life of unborn or even born children.

I could understand how that's upsetting. I was angry about it too. But you know one thing that kind of made it a little more personal for me was my mother was in a women's prison just a year before that in Pennsylvania.

And she had a young lady who came up to her who was one of the staff members of that abortion doctor. And she had personally killed three babies who had been born alive. And she killed them back in the table in the abortion clinic.

And she said, it was not until I killed the third baby that somehow it became real to me what I was doing. And I realized, I have just committed murder. And she was repentant.

But she came to my mother. And she had just heard my mother speak at this women's prison. And she said, can God forgive me? Can God forgive me for what I have done? And my mother was able to say, God can and will forgive even you.

If we ever have a point in our life where we can't say that to someone because we think they've gone too far. We think they're beyond God's grace. We think they are beyond the ability of God to reach them and save their soul.

God help us. God help us. We have been shown much mercy.

We have been shown much grace. Now, I just want to be clear. I'm not saying that there's not a place for civil punishment.

There is. That's a necessary part of society. That people who commit crimes, they need to face the civil magistrate.

That's what they do. They bear the sword. What I'm talking about is believing that someone is incapable of salvation.

That they cannot be saved by grace through faith. Because of what Jesus has done on the cross. When someone comes to that place where they are so blinded by their own hatred.

By their own discrimination. By their own bigotry. They need to really look deeply at the cross and remember what they have been forgiven for and from themselves.

I think they've stepped away from grace. I'm not saying it's easy. I'm not saying it's easy.

And I'm not saying that criminals should all be let free in society. Please hear me on that. That's not my point.

My point is to say that God is the judge. In terms of the spiritual side of things. He is the judge.

He will judge rightly. He will avenge. But there's a couple of things that you have to know about the sovereignty of God.

To understand the sovereignty of God correctly. You have to not only understand the justice of God. Which is part of his nature.

But you also have to understand the love, the mercy and the holiness of God. Those attributes of God must all be taken into account and understood together. In order to understand correctly the doctrine of the sovereignty of God.

That God is powerful overall. God is not arbitrary and capricious in the sense of just sitting in heaven and saying. I think I'm going to be nice to this person.

I'm going to be mean to that person in an arbitrary way. That's not what God is like. Everything that God does is undergirded by his holiness, his love, his mercy and his justice.

And he is infinitely holy and merciful and loving and just. Infinitely. Perfectly.

There's no flaw in any aspect of God's attributes or his character as it relates to these issues. So he comes to Jonah and he says. Do you have a right to be angry? He wants Jonah to question his own assumptions.

Why does Jonah want there to be mercy for him and judgment for the other guy? Does he really understand God? And in these questions that God asks people. I think that's the first thing that God is trying to get them to understand. Do you really know me? Do you really know what I'm like? And then secondly.

Do you understand what I've done for you? Do you understand our relationship? Do you understand your relationship with other people? The nature of the questions God asks is to help us to understand him better. To understand ourselves better. Our relationship with God.

His relationship with us. And our relationship with other people. These questions tend to probe those issues.

What's interesting is that the book ends with what seems like no real resolution. It just ends. We don't really know.

Did Jonah repent himself? Did he get over his issues? Did he find forgiveness in his heart? We don't know. But I think that's part of what makes this question so powerful. When God records these questions in the scripture.

They're not merely there for the purpose of the one who's being asked. They're there for us. These questions God asks are also recorded in the scripture for us to wrestle with.

And to say, do I have a right to be angry? Do I have a right to demand from God that he act in the way that I want him to act? That he always does things the way that I want him to? That he obeys my whims and my wishes? What kind of a God would that be? What kind of a small, petty little God would that be? We're not talking about a pocket-sized God. Who we carry around and we dictate policy to him. And we tell him what to do and when to do it.

We are talking about the almighty God of the universe. Who created everything with the breath of his word. Who sustains everything with his power.

And yet who is kind and loving enough to come down to us in the form of a baby. Who is fully God and fully man. And offer salvation to us.

What an amazing God. How can we not respond with gratitude? How can we not respond with thanksgiving? And how can we not be merciful to other people? I want to share one other scripture with you here in closing. This is from Daniel chapter 4. Daniel chapter 4, we hear the words in the beginning of verse 34 of the great king Nebuchadnezzar.

Who at that time was the leader of the Babylonian empire. He was the most powerful man in the universe. And yet when he exalted himself against God.

God sent him away from the kingdom and he ate grass like an ox. God has a way of bringing you low. Something is going to humble you.

You can do it the easy way or you can do it the hard way. But something is going to humble you. And verse 34 says at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted my eyes to heaven.

And my reason returned to me. And I blessed the most high and praised and honored him who lives forever. For his dominion is an everlasting dominion.

And his kingdom endures from generation to generation. All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing. And he does according to his will among the hosts of heaven.

Among the inhabitants of the earth. And none can stay his hand or say to him what have you done. And he says in verse 36 at the same time my reason returned to me.

And for the glory of my kingdom my majesty and splendor returned to me. My counselors and my lord sought me and I was established in my kingdom. And still more greatness was added to me.

Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honor the king of heaven. For all his works are right and his ways are just. And those who walk in pride he is able to humble.

That is the kind of God that we serve. All his ways are right. They are all just.

And when we think that we are God he can humble us. It is like the question that he asks to Job. Where were you when I created the universe? Do you know all of the mysteries of the universe? In other words are you God? I don't think so.

We are not God. We are just his creation. I find myself in these times when I wonder about why this happens and why that happens.

Sometimes a thought will creep in that is a little different. It is something like why hasn't God just obliterated me off the planet? I mean if I really wanted to talk about the justice of God. That is what would have happened.

If I really, really wanted just the sheer pure justice of God. I would be a pile of ash on the ground. That would be the end of me.

I really only want the justice of God. Or do I also want to understand the love and the mercy and the holiness of God with the justice of God. Because apart from any one of those attributes you don't correctly understand the sovereignty.

They all fit together. It is all part of his nature. Everything he does is right.

Everything he does is holy. It is all loving and it is all just. It is for his glory and it is for our good.

My recommendation to us is even in those difficult times when we don't understand it. When it doesn't make sense to us. My recommendation is be thankful.

Just be thankful. Are we going to figure out every aspect, every nuance of the sovereignty of God? If you do you are a better theologian than me. But I know this much.

I know that he loves me. That he has been merciful to me. That he is altogether holy and he is altogether just.

And I am thankful. And I hope you are too. Let's look to him in prayer.

Our Father and our God. We thank you. That it is because of your mercy.

That we are not consumed. Lord we are so grateful to you. That you are the sovereign ruler of the universe.

There is no God like you. You are almighty over all. You are all powerful.

You are all knowing. We thank you that you are also all loving. And it is because of this.

That we can come before you with something other than just fear and trembling. It is through your Son. The Lord Jesus Christ.

We can come before you boldly. And ask for help in our time of need. So Lord.

We thank you for your grace in our lives. We ask you to help us to be grateful. And to show mercy and love to others.

Not because we deserve it. Not because they deserve it. Because that is your heart.

That is your heart. You want to draw men to yourself. And we thank you that you do that.

We thank you that you have done that for us. It is in Jesus Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/GS37PZFNffg.mp4>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/israel-wayne/life-lessons-from-the-life-of-jonah/>

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