

A Worm's Eye View of Missions

by Warren Wiersbe

Warren Wiersbe's sermon explores Jonah's story to highlight the importance of love for the lost and God's mercy in missions.

Duration: 38:16

Scripture: Exodus 34:6-7, Numbers 14:17-19, Jonah 1:17, Jonah 2:9, Jonah 3:10 - 4:3, Jonah 4:9, Micah 1:1

Topics: "Missions"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the lessons Jonah learned about God in the first three chapters of the book of Jonah. In chapter one, Jonah learns about God's providence and how he cannot run away from God. In chapter two, Jonah learns about God's pardon and how he can be forgiven if he cries out to the Lord. In chapter three, Jonah learns about God's power and how obedience to God leads to powerful works. However, in chapter four, Jonah learns the most important lesson that God is more concerned about the worker than the work. The preacher emphasizes the importance of truly knowing God and not just knowing about Him. Jonah's prayers are shown to be selfish and lacking in compassion for others. The sermon concludes by highlighting the need to know God deeply and to become more like Him.

Transcript

Now we turn to Jonah chapter 4. If you and I were writing the book of Jonah, there wouldn't be any chapter 4, which shows how little we know about the ways of God. After all, chapter 3 records Jonah's success. A million people, plus their animals, repented.

That's all the church is concerned about today is success. Some good statistics to report. And notice that we've gone back to the little phrase, but.

Now we ran up against this in chapter 1. God told Jonah to arise and go, verse 3, but Jonah. And then in verse 4, but the Lord. You but up against the Lord and he'll but up against you.

Chapter 2, he chastens Jonah. Chapter 3, Jonah obeys. And we go from but Jonah in chapter 2, then Jonah.

Chapter 3, so Jonah, but now we're back to the but again. But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the Lord and said, I pray thee, O Lord, was not this my saying when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God and

merciful, slow to anger, of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.

Therefore now, O Lord, take I beseech thee my life from me. Now, if he hadn't added that from me, and he'd meant it spiritually, he would have gotten someplace. Take, O Lord, my life.

But he wanted to die. It is better for me to die than to live. Then said the Lord, doest thou well to be angry? So Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made a booth for himself, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city.

Hoping, of course, that God would change his mind and destroy the enemy. And the Lord God prepared a gourd, and made it to come up over Jonah. This is a plant with large leaves that looked like the palm of your hand, that it might be a shadow over his head to deliver him from his grief.

So Jonah was exceedingly glad of the gourd. But God prepared a worm, when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass when the sun did rise, that God prepared a vehement east wind.

And the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished it himself to die, and said, it is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry unto death. Then said the Lord, thou hast had pity on the gourd for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night.

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than six score thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand? That means little children. And also much cattle? And would you believe there is no verse 12? It's not dropped out of any manuscript, because it never was in any manuscripts. You know why? You and I have to write verse 12.

Jonah chapter 4 finishes the book and shows us that God is more concerned about the worker than he is the work. God didn't say, well, this is marvelous, Nineveh has repented, there's no judgment, Jonah's sitting there pouting, but that's all right, he'll get over it. No, no, God doesn't do that.

After all, Jonah was God's missionary. Have you ever sat on a committee interviewing a missionary candidate? I have. It's interesting, difficult.

What I'd like to do tonight is consider Jonah as a missionary candidate. All that we know about the book of Jonah now. And I want to call three witnesses to our committee.

We're all going to become a committee of the whole tonight. I want to call, first of all, the witness of his credentials. Now, if you're going to go to be a missionary, you've got to have certain credentials.

They make you fill out certain forms, and they ask a lot of questions. So first we're going to talk about his credentials. Then the witness of his companions.

I want to go through this book and call out the people who were with Jonah and see what they know. And then last of all and most important, the witness of his Lord, his Creator, his Savior. See what God has to say about it.

Let's begin now with the witness of his credentials. Jonah is now seated before us. The committee is meeting, and we're going to ask him the questions that are asked just about every missionary candidate.

Jonah, number one, has God called you Do you feel a call of God? Oh yeah, twice. Twice. Do you really feel you're called of God? Yes.

The word of the Lord came to me saying, arise, go to Nineveh. Yes, I've been called. God's called you.

Yes. Because you don't want to do anything without God calling you. Question number two, Jonah, is your theology evangelical? Are you orthodox in your theology? Oh, of course I am.

I believe in the God of Israel. I believe in God who is gracious and merciful and slow to anger and of great kindness, a God who repents of evil. I believe that salvation is of the Lord.

He said that, you know, back in chapter two, verse nine. All right, you have a call from God and your theology is evangelical. There's a third question.

Jonah, do you pray? Do I pray? Oh, I have prayed in strange places. Does God answer your prayers? Oh, does he answer my prayers? Let me tell you about the miracle that I went through. Now, this story may sound fishy to you, but here is what happened.

And so the committee would look at each other and say, this is good. Here's a man who, when he prays, God works. Now, there's always somebody on every committee who is concerned about the deeper life.

And so some committee member says to Jonah, have you experienced the deeper life? Nobody's gone deeper than I've gone. I've been down to the bottoms of the mountains. I know what it's like to die and to be raised from the dead.

Now, you don't have to talk to me about walking in newness of life. I died and I was raised. I know the deeper life.

Wonderful. We don't want any missionaries who don't know the deeper life. Well, here's another question they always ask.

You've done some preaching, Jonah. Does your preaching bring results? Oh, sure. Haven't you heard? I went and preached to a city.

There were 120,000 children in it, and there were a lot of parents and uncles and aunts, nearly a million people. And the whole city repented. The whole city, even the animals.

Remarkable. Oh, yes, I've had results from my preaching. Yeah.

There's always one like this on the committee. Jonah, can you quote scripture? Do you believe in Bible memory work? Oh, yes, I can quote the Psalms by the yard. And I always quote in the King James.

Back in chapter two, you've got Jonah quoting scripture by the yard. Yes, I believe in scripture. I quote scripture.

In fact, here in chapter four, verse two, when he has this statement, I know thou art a gracious God and merciful and so forth. He's quoting from two experiences in Moses' life, Exodus chapter 34 and Numbers chapter 14. On those two occasions when Israel sinned so grievously and Moses had to go up on the mountaintop and intercede.

These are the words that Moses used. Oh, I can quote the Psalms. I can quote from the law.

That's marvelous. We don't want to meet any missionaries who can't quote scripture. Jonah, have you got any courage? It takes courage to be a missionary.

Oh, I've got courage. I was willing for those people to throw me in the water to save them. I've got courage.

Don't talk to me about courage. I've got enough courage. Now, Jonah, if you'll leave the room, we want to discuss this.

So Jonah leaves the room and you know what the result would be. They would look at these credentials and they would say, you know, this is the finest missionary candidate we have ever interrogated. He's called of God.

He's theologically sound. There's no liberalism. He gets answers to prayer.

He knows what it is to die to self. His preaching has brought results. He can quote scripture and he's a courageous man.

We had better sign him up. He's the kind of missionary we're looking for. And yet, folks, he was a failure.

Here he sits outside the city, angry at the very people he should be reaching. Here he sits pouting. You know, one of our problems today, folks, is that we have the wrong measuring stick.

The one question they did not ask Jonah. And by the way, it's a question we usually ask when we're interrogating missionary candidates on the board where I serve. Do you have a love for the people you're going to minister to? Because if you don't, I don't care what kind of theology you have.

I don't care how many times God has called you. I don't care how many miracles you've been through. I don't care how much preaching you've done.

If you don't have a love for the people you're ministering to, you're a failure and we don't need you. Isn't it too bad that we have so many people who have good theology and bad attitudes? If you were to ask them about their theology, their theology would be as orthodox as it could be, and their attitudes could be as unorthodox and as mean. His credentials.

Well, he passes as far as the credentials are concerned, but God just shakes his head. Now let's call a second witness. Let's call the witness of his companions.

Let's just go through these chapters and find the people who knew Jonah. Let's begin in chapter one. Now we have here, gentlemen and ladies, we have here the sailors who were on board the ship where Jonah was, and I want to ask these sailors a question.

What do you know about Jonah? That man is a troublemaker. Everything was going fine on our ship until he got on. He's a troublemaker.

We were in danger. He was sleeping. You're going to send him to be a missionary? He sleeps.

We were praying to our gods. He didn't come up and pray to his god. When he did, nothing happened.

We finally had to cast some lots and they pointed to him that he was the troublemaker. You're going to send him out to the mission field, a troublemaker like that? He almost wrecked our ship and we almost lost

our lives. He's a troublemaker.

And in the Bible there are two kinds of troublemakers. There are people who cause trouble because they're out of the will of God, and there are people who cause trouble because they're in the will of God. Jonah caused trouble out of the will of God.

David caused trouble out of the will of God. Abraham caused trouble out of the will of God. Jesus caused trouble in the will of God.

Remember one of the indictments they brought against the Lord Jesus when they brought in those witnesses they said he stirs up the people. That's an awful sin to stir up the people because the people ought to just sit and not be stirred up. The same thing was, the same accusation was made to Paul.

These men who have turned the world upside down have come hither. Vance Havner has said wherever Paul went there was either a revival or a riot and sometimes there was both. He's a troublemaker.

Well let's move to the next chapter. Now folks if you'll just move your chairs back a little bit I want to call the great Fish in. He had a rather close attachment to Jonah and we want to talk to him.

Mr. Fish what do you know about this fellow? He is stubborn. He was called by the God who made me to go preach and he refused to do it. I am only a fish but when my God tells me to do something I do it.

I do it gladly. Everything in all of creation does what God wants it to do except people and especially Jonah. He's a stubborn man.

He could have confessed his sin and repented on board that ship but he didn't do it. He could have done it on the way from the ship to the water but he didn't do it. And my God instructed me to go swallow him and on the way down he could have done it.

He didn't do it. It took three days and three nights before he finally was broken. He's a stubborn man and quite frankly Mr. committee members I can't stomach him.

Alright let's move to chapter 3. Chapter 3 let's call on the people of Nineveh. You heard of Jonah? Oh we heard of Jonah. He came walking through our city.

He was the weirdest looking fellow we ever saw and we found out he had been swallowed by a great fish and he had been vomited out in the land. He'd gone through a miracle and he preached a message to us. He said repent.

Forty days Nineveh shall be overthrown. Really he came to be our Savior. He came as an ambassador and he led us to repentance.

But we don't understand this fella. You know he should be in our city praying with people and teaching people and encouraging, passing out follow-up literature, enrolling people. You know where he is? He's out there sitting in a booth pouting.

We found out he really would have been happier if all of us had gone to hell and quite frankly he's a problem to us. We love him because he brought us God's message but we we don't know what to do with him. He's an enigma.

He's a puzzle. He's a problem. We move to chapter 4. Let's talk to the worm.

He may have some grounds for complaint. The worm comes in and we say to the worm, you know Jonah? Yeah. The great creator called me and said I got a job for you to do.

Watch this man. What do you know about him? He is an immature person. Now he may be 40, 50 years old.

I don't know how old Jonah was. He was old enough to know better. But he's a child.

He's immature. Look at the evidences of his immaturity. He's living by his feelings not by obedience to God.

He doesn't feel like he ought to do something and so he's sitting there in that booth pouting. He's angry. He's angry at God.

He's angry at God because he didn't get what he wanted. I meet people regularly whose lives are filled with bitterness because they're angry at God. I've been receiving strange letters from a radio listener who's angry at God and now she's angry at me.

And this is tragic. God didn't do something she thought he should do and he didn't do it the way it was supposed to be done according to her blueprints and she's angry and this bitterness just shows up in her letters. And the worm says you know he's an immature fella.

He's angry living by his feelings. He's immature because he's bigoted and prejudiced. As a Jew he did not want to see Nineveh spared because Nineveh is the enemy of Israel.

He wanted to be able to go home and say to his Jewish congregation, see God destroyed Nineveh for her sins. Now we had better repent or he'll destroy us. He wanted to be a good patriot and he was so bigoted and so prejudiced.

You know bigotry and prejudice are childish. You put dinner in front of a child and on that plate is liver. I heard a song on the radio some months ago, I hate liver, liver makes me quiver.

Frankly I like liver. It saved my life when I was a little boy. I had to eat it regularly and so the child gets liver put in front of him.

I'm not gonna eat that. Why? I don't like it. That's no good reason.

Last time I took medicine I didn't like it. That's no good reason. Prejudice.

Bigotry. And the worm says you know he doesn't have any burden for the lost. You're gonna send him out as a missionary? He has no burden for the lost.

He's sitting there in that booth hoping that the city will be destroyed. Now he was shown mercy by God. God showed him mercy.

God brought him up out of the depths. God was merciful to him but he won't share that mercy with anybody else. He doesn't have a burden for souls.

Oh sure he can quote. He can quote scripture. But he's quoting scripture for men who love souls.

He quotes from Exodus. Has he forgotten that Moses went up there and said dear God pardon the sins of the people of Israel and if you can't pardon them take my life. Judge me but don't judge them.

That's the way Paul prayed. Paul said I'd rather go to hell than see my own people not get the gospel. So says our witnessing worm.

He has no burden for the lost. And he goes on to say he is very unlike the God that he preaches. God is gracious.

This man's not gracious. God is merciful. He's not merciful.

Slow to anger. Why? He loses his temper like that. Great kindness.

He doesn't know the meaning of kindness. Repentance of the evil. His heart is so hard he will not repent.

How can you send him out to bear witness of a God that he really doesn't live like? This last week or so I've been rereading some of Dr. A.W. Tozer's essays. If you've never read Tozer you have robbed yourself. You get a hold of A.W. Tozer's writings and read them.

And every essay, every little message has the same message, same emphasis. It's not important to know about God. We have to know God.

A lot of us know about God. We know about God's character and about God's creation and about God's work. We don't know God.

And the more we know God the more we become like God. And Jonah got A's on all of his theology exams but did not really know God. And our worm continues.

He told you he had answers to prayer. He did but his prayers are very selfish. Why that prayer back in chapter 2 he prayed that to save his own skin.

But in chapter 1 he didn't pray to save anybody else's skin. And here in chapter 4 instead of praying for these dear people who are repenting he's praying take my life. Take my life.

I want to die. I'd rather die than go back home and have to face my Jewish friends having saved Nineveh. His prayers are selfish.

If he doesn't get what he wants he gets angry. To put it in one simple sentence he's pampered. He's pampered.

He likes to have creature comforts. When he was sitting out there in the booth and the gourd came up he was so happy for that gourd because it shaded him from the sun. And our worm says to the committee you know folks the thing that makes you happy shows what your character is.

He wasn't happy because Nineveh repented. He was happy because he had some shade from the sun. But our worm doesn't leave much of a witness left does he? According to Jonah's credentials he's got it made.

He's the ideal missionary. According to Jonah's companions he flunks. He's the worst possible candidate.

What are we going to do? Well there's one more witness we need to call and that's the witness of God. Jonah's creator and Jonah's God. Let's ask God what he knows about this.

Now far be it from me that I should ever interrogate God but let's use our imaginations tonight. Did you call Jonah? Yes I did. Called him twice.

Did Jonah obey you? Yes he obeyed me outwardly but not inwardly. What do you mean by that? His heart wasn't in it. In Ephesians chapter 6 and verse 6 it says doing the will of God from your heart.

And Jonah did my will but not from his heart. He did it because he had to. Are the statements true that these witnesses gave? Yes they're all true.

Every one of them. Well then Lord what do you suggest we do? I suggest we give him another chance. There's another lesson he has to learn from me that he hasn't learned yet.

Let me teach him that lesson. I'm glad God doesn't give up on missionary candidates or preacher candidates or deacon candidates or saint candidates. I'm glad that God didn't give up on Abraham the first time Abraham fell flat on his face down in Egypt.

I'm glad he didn't give up on David when David ran scared. I'm glad he didn't give up on Jeremiah when Jeremiah was ready to quit. I'm glad he didn't give up on Peter when Peter denied him three times.

I'm glad he didn't give up on John Mark. We wouldn't have the Gospel of Mark if he'd given up on John Mark. I'm glad he hasn't given up on you and given up on me.

Now this is no opportunity to tempt God but it is an encouragement not to quit. And God says to the missionary committee let's give him another opportunity. He has some more lessons to learn.

And I think after he's learned these lessons he will be just the missionary you need. I notice how God deals with Jonah. Up till now he's been dealing with Jonah with big things.

Storms and seas and great fish. Lots of noise and pressure. But now he's not doing that.

Now he's dealing with Jonah very gently. He's using things like gore. He's using things like fire.

He's using words and worms and wind. Now the wind he's talking about here is that hot oriental wind that is so stifling and so smothering that you can't take it. When this kind of a wind begins to blow in the desert areas people run for cover.

They find any cool place they can find because this wind just almost buries you in the stifling atmosphere. And the sun was beating down upon Jonah. Nothing noisy.

Nothing huge and cumbersome but it was there. God had to deal further with Jonah but he dealt with him so gently and so patiently and so graciously because he had to teach him one more lesson. You see in the first three chapters of this book Jonah had learned three very important lessons about God.

Chapter one he learned the lesson of God's providence. You can't run away from God. Wherever you go God's going to be there and he'll keep backing you into a corner.

Chapter two he learned the lesson of God's pardon. If you cry out and say Lord forgive me God will forgive you. Chapter three he learned the lesson of God's power.

You obey God, God will do something. God powerfully worked through his word in chapter three. But there's one little word in Jonah 4.10 that shows the fourth lesson Jonah had to learn.

The most important lesson. Not the lesson of God's providence and not the lesson of God's pardon and not the lesson of God's power but the lesson of God's pity. Jonah had to learn how to love lost souls.

Now how did God teach him this? This is a truth I picked up from Phil Lassic. He and I have been working together for a long time. We haven't gotten it written yet but we're working on a book on Jonah.

Phil said to me you know did you ever notice that the first time God dealt with Jonah he stuck him down in the sea, down in the fish, way down where it was dark and dismal and damp, dangerous. The second time he dealt with Jonah he had him right out in the open with the sun beating down on him, that hot wind blowing against him from water which was cold and clammy to heat. From darkness to sunlight.

I said tell me why did he do it that way? Phil said I think that the reason God did this was to remind Jonah of what it felt like to be a lost sinner and I think he's right. What's it like to be a lost sinner? It's like being down in the bottom of the ocean, dark, death. Jonah said I'm in a dungeon, all the bars are around me.

Where are our unsafe people tonight? They're in darkness, they're in death, they're in dungeons. Then he went to the other extreme. What's it like to be unsafe? That awful heat, that awful torment, that constant torture.

I wonder if in Jonah chapter 4 God wasn't giving Jonah a taste of hell. I firmly believe that if tonight every one of us dreamed that we went to hell and came back, it would change our attitude toward lost souls. It would change our attitude toward giving, toward praying, toward obeying, toward missions.

God said let me just take one more opportunity of dealing with Jonah. But Lord, what is it you want from Jonah? I mean after all he did go preach, oh yeah. But you know when I made Jonah, here's what I gave him says God, I gave him a body, I gave him a mind, I gave him a will and I gave him a heart.

I called all of Jonah to serve me. And over in the first chapter I said arise, go to Nineveh. I wanted him to understand my will with his mind.

I wanted him to love my will with his heart. I wanted him to do my will with his will controlling his body. But instead Jonah had my will in his mind but not the rest of him.

And he picked up his body and went in the opposite direction. So I had to track him down and in chapter 2 he said I will, I will. So in chapter 2 I got his will.

Chapter 1 I got his mind. Chapter 2 I got his will. Chapter 3 I got his body.

He took his body and went to Nineveh. But I never got his heart. And I want to get his heart.

Well how are you going to get his heart? I'm going to show him how dumb he is. He's loving the wrong things. And so up comes this plant and shelters Jonah.

He says oh I'm so thankful for this plant. The plant dies. Along came the worm.

That's the end of the plant. And Jonah's very unhappy about the plant. And God says you know Jonah you're a fool.

This plant came up in a night and it perishes in a night. Here's a whole city of people who are going to live forever someplace, heaven or hell. Jonah this plant, you didn't have anything to do with that plant.

It just came and it went. And you were sorry when it left. I made these people over here.

I'm concerned about them. There's just one plant. There's a million people.

The only issue here is your comfort. Over here the issue is eternity. Now Jonah what kind of a person are you? Do you love creature comfort so much? But don't you have any pity for lost souls? He had to teach Jonah the lesson of God's pity.

God wants my heart. Give me thy heart. Keep thy heart with all diligence for out of it are the issues of life.

If the heart is right the will will be right. If the heart is right the mind will be right. If the heart is right the body will be right.

And so the last lesson God had to teach Jonah, I want your heart. If you love me, you'll love my people. I made these people.

They need you. And so when you get right down to it, doing the will of God is not a matter of knowing it in the mind. It's a matter of loving it in the heart.

Ephesians 6.6, doing the will of God from the heart. And if I am faced with something I have to do and I can't honestly say Lord I love this, I love you for this, I've got to stay on my face before God until he has my heart. That's why when Jesus spoke to Peter at that breakfast meeting, he didn't say Peter do you know my will? He didn't say Peter do you understand my word? He said Peter do you love me? And so the most important question we have to answer tonight is we are on trial, not Jonah.

His trial is over. We're on trial. Do we do the will of God from our heart? Do we love the will of God? No matter what it may cost us.

No matter how people may criticize us. No matter what discomfort we may encounter. Do we love the will of God from our heart? That's the way Jesus lived.

I delight to do thy will O Lord, he said. Thy law is within my heart. I do always those things that please him.

That's why there's no verse 12 here. You have to write verse 12. Now some of you would not agree with God.

You'd say well Jonah did his job, leave him alone. Oh no. Verse 12 ought to read and Jonah said O God I repent of my selfishness and my immaturity, forgive me.

Now go with me, we're going back to Nineveh and let's get the work done. I think that's the way it would read and I think that's what Jonah did. I firmly believe in my own heart that Jonah came to the place where he saw how foolish he was.

He confessed his sin and God gave him a compassionate heart for the people to whom he was ministering. The name Jonah means dove. Jonah didn't turn out to be a dove, turned out to be a hawk.

When you think of a dove you think of peace. He brought a storm. When you think of a dove you think of loyalty and love.

He was angry and disobedient. He was grieving the Holy Spirit. Who is the dove? Well Jonah, we have interviewed you.

Your credentials are marvelous. Your companions don't have such a good testimony for you. But God's on your side Jonah.

God's going to give you another chance. Learn the lesson of God's pity. When you've learned that, when you can do the will of God from the heart Jonah, God can really use you and you'll be blessed and you'll be a blessing.

Gracious Father, how many times we have counterfeited obedience by outward actions when our inward attitudes were very, very selfish and sinful. And for this we are sorry. We are not here tonight oh God to search each other.

You must search our hearts. You must try us. Let us know if there be some wicked way in us.

Father, we like to excuse our sins because we have good theology. Oh Lord, help us to see tonight that our theology is only as good as our living. That our believing is worthless without behaving.

Gracious Father, deliver us from sins in good standing. Sins of bitterness and criticism. Sins of anger.

Sins of inner disposition that are ungodly. And help us tonight to begin to learn the lesson of your pity. And may the love of Christ constrain us.

And may the love of God fill us. And may we do the will of God from the heart. Not of necessity.

Not of compulsion. But out of love. I pray for the one who may be here who is not saved.

May that one come and trust Christ. I pray for that believer who is rebelling. May that one surrender.

Do something to all of us tonight so that we will not be unloving for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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