

The Missing Missionary

by Warren Wiersbe

Warren Wiersbe's sermon explores Jonah's disobedience and the broader implications of fulfilling God's mission in our lives.

Duration: 36:20

Scripture: Psalm 148:1-5, Psalm 148:7-8, Jonah 1:1-13

Topics: "Evangelism", "Obedience To God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of using our words to share the message of Jesus Christ. He contrasts the meaningless conversations people have about trivial matters with the privilege we have to speak about God. The preacher then focuses on the story of Jonah, highlighting how Jonah failed in his calling as a prophet and rebelled against God's will. This rebellion led to Jonah being unable to hear from God directly, and instead, God had to communicate with him through a storm and a fish. The sermon concludes by emphasizing the consequences of not fulfilling our purpose as creatures of God and the importance of sharing and giving, just as the rest of the universe does.

Transcript

Jonah chapter 1. Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it, for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord, and went down to Joppa, and he found a ship going to Tarshish. How convenient.

And so he paid the fare and went down into it to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the Lord. Now if you have a but Jonah in verse 3, you've got to have a but the Lord in verse 4. You start butting against the Lord, he lets you know about it. But the Lord sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a tempest in the sea, so that the ship was in danger of being broken.

Then the mariners, and interestingly enough, the Hebrew word there for mariners is the word salts, and most sailors don't like to be called salts. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his God, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship, and he lay and was fast asleep.

So the shipmaster came to him and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us that we perish not. That is the cry of every unsaved person. Wake

up, O believer, and get praying, and get busy, because we're perishing.

And they said every one to his fellow, Come, let us cast lots that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. They knew the storm was something great, and so they cast lots, and a lot fell upon Jonah. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us.

What is thine occupation? From whence comest thou? What is thy country? Of what people art thou? It's a strange place for a press conference, isn't it? And he said unto them, I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord. You'd never believe that. The God of heaven, who hath made the sea and the dry land, then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? You know, there's no answer to that question.

J. Hudson Taylor witnessed to a Mandarin scholar in China, and led the man to the Lord, and the man said, How long have your people had this message? He said, Hundreds and hundreds of years. He said, My father, and my father's father, and my father's father's father died in darkness. Why were you so late in coming? There's no answer to that question.

For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the Lord, because he told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do for thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea raged and was tempestuous. He said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea, so shall the sea be calm for you.

For I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. That next word is an amazing word. Nevertheless, the men rode hard to bring her to the land, but they could not, for the sea raged and was tempestuous against them.

Wherefore, they cried out unto the Lord, the thing Jonah wasn't willing to do, and said, We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood. For thou, O Lord, hast done as it pleased thee. Isn't it amazing that these heathen sailors were Calvinists? They believed in the sovereignty of God.

So they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. Then the men feared the Lord exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the Lord, and made vows. Now the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

And then Jonah prayed. Now we don't have to wonder why Jonah disobeyed God. I have read many scholarly treatises on why did Jonah disobey God when it tells us in verse 3 that Jonah was fleeing from the presence of the Lord.

That doesn't mean he was trying to run away from God. He knew you couldn't run away from God. Why? If you descend the deepest hell, he's there.

You go to the highest heaven, he's there. Jonah knew his theology. This phrase, from the presence of the Lord, means he was resigning his job as a prophet.

The prophet stood in the presence of the Lord, and God said, Jonah, go to the heathen and tell them my message. And Jonah said, I'm resigning. Now why did he do it? Well, he tells us why he did it back in chapter 4 in verse 2. 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? Oh, he tells us now what he'd been thinking about.

Therefore, I fled before unto Tarshish, for I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Jonah fled because he did not want God to save the Ninevites, he tells us. You see, the Assyrians, and Nineveh was the great capital of the Assyrian empire, the Assyrians were on the rise.

They were a growing power and they were a threat to Israel. And Jonah said, I would rather the Assyrians be destroyed than Israel be destroyed. And so he fled and would not carry God's message.

But the interesting thing is this, now don't miss this. This book is not about Nineveh. The story of Nineveh ends in chapter 3, verse 10.

If this book were about Nineveh, chapter 3, verse 10 would be the end. The book is not about Nineveh. Nineveh is mentioned nine times in this book.

Book's about Jonah. He's mentioned 18 times in this book. And God is mentioned over and over again.

This is not a story about Jonah and Nineveh, it's a story about Jonah and God. Did you know that the worker is more important than the work? God spent 13 years getting Joseph ready to do his work. God spent 40 years, really 80 years, getting Moses ready for his work.

Would you believe that Jonah needed Nineveh as much as Nineveh needed Jonah? Did you know that when God calls you to do something, he's not calling you only because of what they need from you, but what you need from them. And Jonah needed Nineveh. Because God could not make out of Jonah all that Jonah could become if Jonah was not obedient to go to Nineveh.

I'm talking to somebody right now who's gotten a calling of some kind. God's spoken to you and said, here's what I want you to do. You say, Lord, I'm not going to do it.

It doesn't make sense. It's not rational. It's not reasonable.

I'm not going to do it. If you don't do it, you won't stand in the same place. You'll go backwards.

God called Jonah to Nineveh because Jonah needed Nineveh if he was going to be fulfilled in his life as he should. By the way, that's why God gives us his will. God doesn't give us his will just to get things done.

God called Hudson Taylor to China, not just for China, but for Hudson Taylor. God called Grenfell up to Labrador, not just for the nation's sake, but for the doctor's sake. God called D.L. Moody to minister in Great Britain.

When he landed in Great Britain, he was so seasick he said, I'll never come back. He went back because Great Britain did something for D.L. Moody that Chicago didn't do. I say it again now.

Jonah needed Nineveh as much as Nineveh needed Jonah. And you need the will of God, and I need the will of God, because only then can we be fulfilled. Now, I want to show you how Jonah missed his fulfillment on four levels of his life.

You take Jonah, the person, and you can look at him on four different levels. You can see him as a creature in God's creation, just one of God's creatures. That's the lowest level.

Then you can see him on the next level, a man in God's image. Not just a creature, but a man. Then the next level, a Hebrew in God's covenant.

And then the highest level of all, a prophet in God's service. Now you take those four levels, a creature in God's world, a man in God's image, a Hebrew in God's covenant, a prophet in God's service. You take those four levels and you see how Jonah did not fulfill himself because he rebelled against the will of God.

We Christians have the foolish idea we can play with the will of God. We can turn it on and off like the TV set or the radio. You can't.

You know who is hurt the most if we don't obey the will of God? We are. And God looked at Jonah and said, Jonah, you are a creature. I want you to be fulfilled.

You are a man. I want you to be fulfilled. You are a Hebrew.

I want you to be fulfilled. You are a prophet. I want you to be fulfilled.

Jonah said no, and he lost on every level of his life. He was a creature in God's world. Now in the book of Jonah, there are many evidences of creation.

Jonah said, I worship God who made the heavens. He made the earth. He made the dry land and the sea.

I worship the God of creation. Oh, let's start with the mineral kingdom. That's the lowest kingdom.

The sea obeyed God. That ship could not have been sailing on that sea if the sea had not obeyed God. Let's take the vegetable kingdom.

That's the next one. Get to chapter four. There's a gourd that obeys God.

Let's move into the animal kingdom. There's a great fish that obeyed God, chapter one. Chapter four, there's a little worm that obeyed God.

Everything in creation was obeying God except Jonah. Did you ever stop to think that all of creation obeys God? Now, even the disasters that we look upon somehow fit into God's plan. I don't understand earthquakes and plagues and fires and floods, and neither do you.

But I have a suspicion that these heathen sailors were in the right when they said, Lord, thou hast done as it is pleased thee. When the weather gets bad, I sometimes turn to Psalm 148. I recommend this to you.

It's better than the weather report. Psalm 148. Praise ye the Lord.

Praise the Lord from the heavens. Praise him in the heights. Praise ye him all his angels.

Praise ye him all his armies. Praise ye him sun and moon. Praise him all ye stars of light.

The sun is obeying God and praising him. So is the moon. Praise him ye heavens of heavens and ye waters that are above the heavens.

Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created. He hath also established them forever and ever. He hath made a decree which shall not pass.

Praise the Lord from the earth, ye serpents and all deeps, fire and hail, snow and vapor, stormy wind fulfilling his word, mountains and all hills, fruitful trees and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, creeping things and flying fowl. Interesting thing. All of creation is obeying God.

Even those little dice that they were throwing on board ship. Imagine throwing dice on the deck of a ship tossed in the storm. But those dice obeyed God.

I say it again. Everything in creation was obeying God except Jonah. Now do you know why all of creation obeys God? Because the only way they can fulfill themselves is to be obedient.

If a shrimp tries to act like a whale, he disobeys God and doesn't fulfill his purpose. If a tree tries to act like an animal, it doesn't fulfill its purpose and doesn't glorify God. Do you know that tonight all of creation is sharing? I remember hearing a preacher in seminary who had just finished going through a cancer operation.

And I can never forget the first statement of his message. He stood in the, it was Earl V. Pierce. He stood in the pulpit at the seminary and he said, do you know what a cancer cell is? We all sat and waited.

He said, a cancer cell, according to my doctor, is a cell that has become selfish and won't cooperate. You know what Jonah was? Jonah was a cancer cell in God's universe. He wouldn't cooperate.

The wind was cooperating. The waves were cooperating. The vegetable kingdom, the animal kingdom, but not Jonah.

Now, if this universe did not work together, you and I would die. If the sun decided, I'm not going to give light to those people down there. Look what they do.

They put smog up in the air. I can't even get through anymore. No more light.

We die. If the moon were to say, I don't like this business of traveling around the earth. I'd sooner be on my own.

We'd be in trouble. If some star out there decided to go it on his own and not contribute to the total giving of the universe, we'd be in trouble. I say it again, all of the universe is sharing and giving and cooperating and obeying God except Jonah.

He was a creature in God's world, but he was selfish and he wasn't fulfilling his purpose as a creature, which is to give. If nature stopped giving, you'd stop living. Now let's move to the second level.

By disobeying God, not only was he not fulfilling himself as a creature in God's world, he wasn't fulfilling himself as a man in God's image. Jonah was a member of the human family, and so are you and I. I'm glad I don't belong to the mineral kingdom. I'd hate to be a stone.

I'm glad I don't belong to the vegetable kingdom. I would want to be a head of lettuce or spinach. I'm glad I don't belong to the animal kingdom.

I don't know what animals think about, but I've watched cows as they've stood there chewing their cud. I've thought to myself, what an awful thing not to be able to think a noble thought, not to be able to have a mind that can grasp things. I'm glad God made me a human being with all of its limitations.

We belong to the human family. God created us. In him, we live and move and have our being.

God provides for us. He gives us food to eat, and he lets the seasons come faithfully. They arrive a little later, a little earlier sometimes, but they always faithfully come.

Do you know that as a human being, you share the same common burdens of human beings all over the world? That's why Paul writes to the churches of Galatia, and he says, now, I want you to do good to all men, especially those who are of the household of faith. Last year, we received a special offering for the earthquake victims in Central America, and somebody said, well, is all this going to go to Christians? I said, who cares? We're helping people. When I was in the hospital, and they had to pump three pints of blood into my system, I didn't ask if that blood came from Christians.

I didn't ask the man who was driving the ambulance, are you saved? There are human things we do for human beings just because they're human. The story of the Good Samaritan reminds us that the man lying on the roadside dying is a human being, and if I'm a human being, I have an obligation to help that man with what his needs may be. Cain killed his brother, and then he had the audacity to lie about it.

God said, where is your brother? He said, how do I know where my brother is? Am I my brother's keeper? And the answer to that question is yes, you are your brother's keeper. And if Jonah couldn't go to Nineveh because they were lost sinners who needed salvation, he at least could go as a human being to help human beings. Do you know the greatest thing you can do for a person is to share the gospel with them? Jonah not only was unconcerned about Nineveh, he was unconcerned about these heathen sailors.

He got them into trouble. Now you may not like this statement. That's all right.

You go through your Bible, and you find that whenever a believer gets out of the will of God, he gets unbelievers into trouble. Abraham got out of God's will, and Egypt got into trouble. David got out of God's will, people were in trouble.

Jonah got out of God's will, and the very heathen he should have been witnessing to, he almost killed. Now one of the most convicting things in this book is in verse 13, nevertheless. Would you notice that? Here were idol worshipping, unbelieving, heathen sailors, get this, doing everything they could do to save Jonah.

They said here is a human being who needs our help, and they did everything they could to save Jonah, and Jonah was doing nothing to save the people he was sent to. I have seen unsaved surgeons hover over the bodies of Christian people and spend hours working on them, unsaved doctors and nurses and anesthetists and all kinds of technicians, human beings helping human beings. I wonder how many Christians would go out of their way to talk to some of them about how to be saved.

What I'm saying is the unsaved put us to shame. If God suddenly removed all the unsaved people from the administration of the city of Chicago, you'd be in trouble, and so would I. Who's going to make the electricity? I just wonder if all this electricity is made by saved people. I doubt it.

Who's going to put out the fires? Who's going to protect the city? You see, we Christians get so elite, we become so separatist. We think that unsaved people can't do anything. Unsaved people put us to shame in doing their job when you look at the way we do our job.

Jonah, why aren't you in Nineveh trying to win those people? I'm running away. Yeah, but look at these unsaved mariners. They're working hard to save your life.

Jonah was a creature in God's world, but he wasn't fulfilling his purpose as a creature. He was a man made in God's image, and he wasn't fulfilling his purpose as a man. Now let's move to the third level.

He was a Hebrew in God's covenant, but he wasn't living like it. You know why God called the Jews? God called the Jews to bless the Gentiles. You knew that.

Genesis chapter 12, when God gave his covenant to Abraham, he said, now, Abraham, I'm calling you. I'm calling you out from among the Gentiles. You're going to be the first Jew, and I'm going to bless you.

I'm going to multiply you. That through you, all of the nations of the earth might be blessed. God separated the Jews that they might be a blessing to the Gentiles.

And you know what? They didn't do it. When you read the history of Israel, you find that instead of staying separated so they could be a blessing, they got involved. They became like the Gentiles.

Seven times in the book of Judges, God brings in a nation to spank Israel. And then when Israel would not learn her lesson, God picked her up and took her out to a Gentile nation, Babylon. The church has made the same mistake.

Election in the Bible is to responsibility. God chooses us that he may use us. And here was a Jew, and that Jew should have looked at those Gentiles and said, God, this is why you called me.

You separated me that I might minister to them. The Jews not only made the mistake of getting infected by the Gentiles, but they made the mistake of getting isolated from the Gentiles. They went the other extreme.

When Jesus came to the earth, he found the Pharisees wrapping their robes around themselves and calling the Gentiles dogs, uncircumcised dogs. He found a wall in the temple that said if any Jew, if any Gentile goes past this wall, he'll be killed. And so when Jesus died, he ripped the veil and said, come on into God.

And he knocked down the wall and said, there's no difference. Jonah was a Hebrew in God's covenant. God had separated him and God had called him that he might be a blessing to the Gentiles, but he wasn't doing it.

Instead, he was asleep. Instead, he was causing trouble. He wasn't praying.

He wasn't awake. The one man on board that ship who had the answer to the problem was Jonah. And he refused to do his job.

It's not hard to see Christians in chapter one of Jonah. Did you notice the adverb? He went down to Joppa. He went down into the ship.

He went down into the sides of the ship. Over in chapter two, he went down to the bottom of the mountains. What is the direction when you turn away from God's will? Down, down, down.

And what were the heathens saying? We're perishing. We're perishing. What was he doing sleeping? I tell you, when that trumpet blows to wake up the dead, some of the living dead are going to be awakened.

And more than one sleeping saint is going to say, Lord, not now. It's going to be too late. I got things I need to do.

He was sleeping when he should have been praying. He was disobeying when he should have been obeying. He was an ambassador of peace who caused a storm.

And his name means dove. What a dove. More like a vulture.

The dove is a symbol of purity. And he was a sinner. The dove is a symbol of peace.

He was a troublemaker. He was a Hebrew in God's covenant, but he wasn't fulfilling his purpose. You know why God's called the church? You know why we're separated from the world? Not to be isolated from the world, but that we might be able to minister to the world.

If we're like the world, we can't help the world. If we're unlike the world, we can win people to Christ. Now the highest level, and here we close.

He did not fulfill his purpose as a creature. He did not fulfill his purpose as a man. He did not fulfill his purpose as a Hebrew.

He did not fulfill his purpose as a prophet in God's service. Jonah, you aren't just a creature. You're a man.

You aren't just any man. You're a Jewish man. And you aren't just any Jew.

You're a prophet. You see, as a creature, he just declared the glory of God. All of creation does that.

As a man, he was made in the image of God. As a Hebrew, he'd had the special blessing of God. As a prophet, he could share the message of God, and he wasn't doing it.

He was sleeping. Jonah was given a very, very high calling as a prophet. You say, well, I'm not called to be a prophet.

You're called to be a spokesman. You're called to be a witness. I was in traffic court a couple of weeks ago.

Now don't be criticizing me. It was a very slippery day, and I had to make the choice of either going through a red light or hitting my brakes and skidding, and so I went through the red light. And the policeman hadn't gotten his quota that day, so he pulled me over and gave me a ticket.

So I went to traffic court. Now, I didn't enjoy spending three hours sitting there, but I certainly learned a lot. My, it's great to see how the other half lives.

They had a fellow up before the judge. By the way, lest you worry about me, I went up and he said, why'd you do it? And I told him what I told you. He said, go home.

So I went home. That was the end of that. But they had a man up before the judge who had been guilty or been accused of a number of things, and he was supposed to have a witness there to help him.

And so the judge said, where is, and he called, witness for so-and-so. Nobody showed up. Tried again.

Where is so-and-so witness? I thought to myself, isn't that awful? This guy's in trouble because there's no witness. God said to me, how many times have people been in trouble because you haven't witnessed? You see, God called Jonah to be a prophet. A prophet is one who speaks forth.

He is a forth teller, not just a foreteller. And God has given to us the glorious privilege of opening our mouths and saying something worth listening to. Ever listen to conversation on a bus or an elevator? It's crazy.

Everybody in Chicago talks about the weather. I can't think of a better way to waste your time because you can't do anything about it anyway. And just by the time you're through talking about it, it changes.

Baseball season is starting before long. They'll all be talking about baseball. There's so much inane, insipid conversation.

We have the privilege of opening our mouths and sharing Jesus Christ. He was a prophet in God's service and he failed in his high calling. And I think the church has done the same thing.

God has called us to speak out. You shall be witnesses unto me to the uttermost parts of the earth. But we don't do it.

So on these three, on these four levels, Jonah failed. God said, Jonah, if you'll just go to Nineveh, you'll fulfill your purpose as a creature in my universe. All of the universe will be cooperating with you if you obey me.

But you know what? He disobeyed and everything in the universe fought him. The wind was against him. The waves were against him.

The mariners were against him after they couldn't get the ship to land. The dice were against him. The great fish was against him.

Everything was against Jonah when as a creature he was not obeying the Creator. This is why people out of the will of God have such a tough time. All of the universe is fighting against him.

But you know, when we're obeying the will of God, everything in the universe works for us. The stars in their courses will fight for you when you're walking in the will of God. If you haven't read lately or never have read Dr. Olson's magnificent book, *Doctar*, read it.

I cannot get over, when I first read that, I said to myself, this is the closest thing to J. Hudson Taylor in modern times I've ever read. How God did amazing things in answer to prayer because people were in the will of God. The weather worked for them.

Everything just went right together. Jonah did not fulfill his purpose as a human being. He did not have compassion for fellow human beings and therefore he ended up in loneliness.

At the bottom of the ocean, Jonah did not fulfill his purpose as a believer, as a member of God's covenant family, and so God had to chasten him. Jonah did not fulfill his purpose as a servant of God, a prophet, and therefore God couldn't talk to him anymore. God wanted to talk to him face to face but he couldn't do it.

He had to talk to him through the wind, had to talk to him through a storm, had to talk to him through a fish. I tell you, friend, when you get to the place in your life where God can't talk to you anymore, you better watch out. Well, fortunately, Jonah didn't stay that way but we have to pick that up next time.

Then Jonah prayed. What is the message of Jonah chapter 1? Well, here's a missing missionary. All the angels are looking down watching Nineveh.

Any minute now, any minute now, he'll show up. He's not there. A missing missionary.

But you know who was missing the most? The missionary was missing the most. He was missing the privilege of fulfilling everything that God had made him because he was rebelling against the will of God. That's why the scripture says, the way of the transgressor is hard.

That doesn't mean a bum on Skid Row, that means anybody. The way of a transgressor is hard. If you're missing God's will, you're the one that's missing.

If you obey God's will and I obey God's will, it means fulfillment, becoming all that we can become. And the result is people get saved and God is glorified and all the universe works with us and there's victory. Don't be missing because if you're missing the will of God, you're missing the blessing of God.

Gracious Father, someone right now may be out of your will and knows it. Perhaps it's some unbeliever who's never been saved and God is not willing that any should perish. We know it's your will for them to come and trust Christ, help them to come.

Perhaps it's some student, perhaps it's some member of the Moody Church. Father, I don't know, but I pray that your spirit will so apply the word that we'll realize tonight what a privilege it is, not just an obligation, but an opportunity to do the will of God and to find that blessed fulfillment in every area of our lives to your glory. To that end, I pray that as we sing this time of song of dedication, that we might do it from our hearts and that we might not go away running in the opposite direction of your will.

For Jesus' sake, amen.

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