

“Resurrection from the Deep”, Book of Jonah, Craig Crawshaw

- Have you ever felt that you were moving away from the Lord – maybe even running away from Him?
- Have you ever felt frustrated and ill-equipped to do something for God that He was urging you to do?
- Or have you ever felt something happening to you is “just not fair!”?
- If so (and I’m guessing that’s most of us), then today’s message from the book of Jonah should hit home.

Last week pastor David taught us about the prophet Elijah’s ascension into heaven, foreshadowing the ascension of Jesus. And it was the prophet Elisha who followed Elijah as his disciple. But did you know that it was the prophet Jonah who succeeded Elisha? It was these three “trio” of prophets who were the primary voice of God to the northern part of Israel when it divided after Solomon’s reign.

Jonah, for his part, ministered primarily during the reign of king Jeroboam II, approximately 750 B.C. He is mentioned in the historical book of 2 Kings, confirming that he was indeed a real person, with a real ministry to the Hebrew people, though this is often disputed by skeptics. And the details about Jonah recorded here match perfectly with the opening verses of the book of Jonah.

2 Kings 14:24-25... *Jeroboam [II] the son of Joash king of Israel became king in Samaria, and reigned forty-one years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord; he did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam [I] the son of Nebat, which he made Israel sin... He restored the border of Israel... according to the word of the Lord, the God of Israel, which He spoke through His servant Jonah the son of Amittai, the prophet, who was of Gath-hepher.*

LINKING JESUS AND JONAH

Our present sermon series, “Jesus, B.C.” has the emphasis of discovering Jesus in the pages of our Old Testament. And it is easy to find a direct link between Jonah and Jesus, for Jesus Himself forever bound Jonah with Himself, recorded both in the gospels of Matthew and Luke.

Matthew 12:38-41 *Then some of the scribes and Pharisees said to Him, “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” But He answered and said to them, “An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet.” For 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. 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 greater than Jonah is here.*

Here Jesus is not only verifying the truth of the Jonah account, but also declaring that just as Jonah and the events of His life were a sign to the people of His day, so is Jesus a sign to His generation. Jonah’s “death and burial” in the belly of the great fish, though not literal death and burial, and his subsequent “resurrection” to life from the fish, is linked to Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection. And likewise, when Jonah was brought forth from the fish, His ministry extended to the Gentiles, bringing them repentance at Nineveh. And in the same way the ministry of Jesus, when resurrected, extended primarily to the Gentiles through the apostle Paul. Jesus B.C.? - absolutely!

So, at the outset we see that Jonah is both (1) a type of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, and (2) that he is a type of Jesus Himself, as God's sign to the Gentiles. With that, let us proceed to an examination of the pages of the book of Jonah, for there is much spiritual gold to be mined from its account.

THE MESSAGE OF JESUS IN THE BOOK OF JONAH

The book of Jonah, though relating events of the prophet Jonah, is really telling of God moving through the events happening to Jonah. If we miss this emphasis on God, we miss the emphasis of the book and are prone to misinterpret the message intended. As we approach the message of this precious book, let me offer a simple, helpful chapter-by- chapter outline.

OUTLINE OF GOD IN JONAH

- Chapter 1 THE STORM - God appoints a storm to redirect Jonah
- Chapter 2 THE FISH – God appoints a fish to protect Jonah
- Chapter 3 THE CITY – God uses Jonah to change a city's heart
- Chapter 4 THE PLANT – God uses an illustration to teach of unconditional love

So, with this outline, let us move through this book of Jonah and see what we can learn of the heart of God and how this heart is manifested in the person of Jesus.

Chapter 1 - THE STORM

The book opens with God calling Jonah to take God's message to the city of Nineveh. "The Word of the Lord" is the subject of the first sentence of the book, coming to Jonah. And the second verse is God's commission to Jonah – take my message of concern to Nineveh about their wickedness.

When Jesus first appears on the scene of adult ministry his first words are "Repent and believe." It begins with "repent"- a "cry" against our wickedness. Right from the beginning of this book we see God's heart of hatred against sin, and yet also His desire to communicate that with the hope of restoration.

Jonah's reaction – to run the other way. Jonah was from a town just north of Nazareth. Nineveh was some 500 miles northeast. Tarshish was due west all the way to what we know as southern Spain – directly across the Mediterranean Sea, some 2500 miles away. Tarshish was essentially as far away as Jonah could commercially travel away from God's mission.

Does this reaction sound vaguely familiar to our reaction sometimes when we are urged by the Spirit to share the good news with someone, or get involved in a ministry? We fear and honor God, as did Jonah,

Jonah 1:9 *I am a Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.*

but we choose to ignore and even run the other way. Like Jonah, we know we can't get away from God's presence, but we want to get away from God's prompting and call. When that happens, it never goes well for us, as Jonah discovered.

As Jonah sails from the coastal town of Joppa west toward Tarshish, “The Lord hurled a great wind on the sea” (1:4) which Jonah realized was because of his disobedience (1:12). When the sailors cast lots to determine on whose account this storm has come, God caused the lot to fall on Jonah (1:7). And then when the sailors finally throw Jonah overboard, on his recommendation, God causes the sea to stop its raging (1:15). Do you see how the story is really about God’s working through Jonah’s circumstances more than about Jonah?

God will often use natural and supernatural means to let me know that He is in charge, not me. God cared far more about the souls of the Ninevites than He did for the feelings of Jonah about being God’s voice. God was about redirecting Jonah to do the right thing – and this is so much of what we see that Jesus did in gently training his disciples who were so slow of learning, as are we. God did not have Jonah thrown overboard to punish him, as much as to firmly redirect him to do the right thing. This is God’s “tough love” which He will also use on us, His beloved children, and what He sometimes calls us to use on those we love.

The Lord Jesus has called us to take His gospel of love to our world. Are we running the other way?

Chapter 2 - THE FISH

Jonah 1:17 And the Lord appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.

Could this really have happened? The debate rages, but since Jesus confirmed this as having happened (Matt. 12:38) we must trust the Word of our Lord. Plus, nothing is impossible with God. Yet even from a natural standpoint it has been found that many large fish, or whales, have and could support life within their stomach for days. The scoffers just don’t want to believe it could be so. Yes, it could have happened, and it did happen.

Was this a punishment for Jonah? We must reply, “no.” For God was protecting Jonah from death by “appointing” the great fish. Again, note this event of the narrative also begins with God, not with Jonah. God appoints the fish – for the purpose of protecting Jonah from the raging sea and ultimately delivering him towards his appointed mission. For it is God who...

Jonah 2:10 “commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.”

But before that happens at the end of chapter two, what transpires in the belly of the fish? Jonah is praying. He begins by calling out to God in his distress (2:2), and then recalls the terrors of almost drowning in the sea (2:3-6). God was clearly getting Jonah’s attention while he was underwater – literally and figuratively. But then he recalls how in his distress he “remembered the Lord” (2:7). And it was at this point that God saved him by providing the protection of the fish.

Jonah 2:9 But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. That which I have vowed I will pay. Salvation is from the Lord.

I wonder what his vow to the Lord was that he promised in his prayer to pay back? I’ll bet I can guess: “Dear Lord if you will just keep me from drowning I promise I will go wherever you want me to and say whatever you want me to.” Here he is in the belly of the great fish praying and recounting and praising the Lord. And when he finishes with “salvation is from the Lord” the Lord commands the fish to vomit him onto the shore. Not a pretty picture, but certainly a pretty ending to the account.

And may I suggest that it is when we finally cry “uncle” to the Lord and yield our will to conform to His, that we will find the Lord seeming very present and providing the salvation from circumstance for which we long.

But one more question remains – why 3 days and 3 nights? Could not the Lord have accomplished Jonah's redirection in two days or four? The answer should be clear when we recall Jesus' statement to the scribes and Pharisees some 800 years later. It was to be the same sign as Jesus' interment and resurrection from death – "3 days and 3 nights." And then you will say, "but if Jesus died on Friday and rose on Sunday morning, wasn't that just a portion of 3 days and only 2 nights?" Yes – but because of Jonah that phrase had become a well-known idiom in Hebrew culture, and Jesus was just tying the sign of his death and resurrection to the same sign of Jonah.

It is in this remarkable type of Jonah "resurrected" as it were, from the dead, that we see in greater fullness the impact of God's raising Jesus from the dead. Jesus too went to "Sheol," as did Jonah in spirit (2:2) but He in reality to proclaim victory to the captives there (1 Peter 3:19). And both were raised in miraculous, supernatural fashion, to be seen by others in physical wholeness.

Jesus B.C. in Jonah – yes indeed.

Chapter 3 - THE CITY

Many consider the "great fish" part of Jonah the great miracle – and miracle of preservation and redirecting it was. But I and most other commentators marvel at the greater miracle of Chapter 3 – the repentance of Nineveh. As we shall see, this story is too about God far more than about Jonah. And in Jonah walking through Nineveh we see a picture of Jesus walking the roads of the Holy Land proclaiming, "repent and believe."

Nineveh was a huge city as proven by archaeology. It was really four cities in one, with its circumference about 60 miles around (about "a three day walk" as Jonah 3:3 describes it, for a traditional day's walk to the Jew was 20 miles). Archeological evidence indicates something like 1500 towers around its circumference, which would be about one every 200 feet! Its walls were 100 feet thick and its gates could allow 3 chariots entering side by side. And where do you think present day Nineveh is? – none other than Mosul, Iraq! – the city of such hot contention between the forces of Isis and those that fight against that wicked ideology. All to say that Nineveh is still in the center of the current news!

Many see Jonah as a reluctant prophet, disobeying God and stubborn to the core, being punished by God for his disobedience by being thrown in to the sea and swallowed by a great fish. But as the late, great J. Sidlow Baxter expounds – Jonah was really a zealous Jewish patriot, who loved his God but hated the notion that the barbarous and wicked capitol of Assyria, the nation that God has prophesied would take Israel into captivity, would be spared and given compassion by God. And he wanted no part of that. It might be akin to God calling you to evangelize the people that has raped and killed your family. You would want to obey God, but might well find it loathsome to do so.

We know this was Jonah's heart, for he discloses clearly why he fled to Tarshish:

Jonah 4:2... I fled to Tarshish for I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity.

Jonah was struggling big-time with God's unconditional love. The gospel disciples struggled big-time with Jesus' unconditional love to the Samaritan women, or the Pharisee Nicodemus, or the Gentile Syrophonecian woman. Peter for a time struggled big-time with Paul's unconditional love to the Gentiles, as commissioned by Jesus. And if we are honest, we sometimes have a difficult time representing God's unconditional love to those around us who we might deem less worthy, because of their sinful practices.

Yet we see Jonah now going obediently to Ninevah and doing exactly what God once again asks.

Jonah 3:1 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you.”

Note once again that this portion of the narrative begins with God – it is His story. And of special interest is to note that the phrase translated here and in most Bibles “great city” is literally “a great city to God,” which gives it an entirely different and compassionate meaning. Despite its wickedness, it was a city full of people whom God still loved and cared for. It was full of those God had created, and so to God it was “a great city.” This reminds me of Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem – a city of sin, but a city full of people the Son of God loved and for whose sins He would soon die.

We need not assume that all Jonah said as he walked was “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” in monotonous repetition. We must read “through the lines” and assume, especially since the king of Ninevah gets involved, that Jonah had opportunity to bring God’s message to the leadership of the city in such a way that the message was communicated throughout the city. No, he was still not happy about saving the city, but he was being obedient to the God who had gotten his attention, protected him and redirected him.

Nevertheless, the miracle of a city (1) believing in God, (2) fasting of food and water in mourning and (3) praying in a repeated vigil of repentance is striking (3:4).

Jonah 3:10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their wicked way, then God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it.

It is when God sees by our actions that we are serious about seeking Him that we find Him near and attentive to our condition. Our sincere and contrite repentance always gets His full attention. There may still be consequences to pay, but His unconditional love kicks into full swing and we are set free in forgiveness and made righteous once again. That is the promise of Jesus to all who trust and believe in Him. In Nineveh’s improbable repentance we see our improbable reconciliation to God through Jesus.

Chapter 4 - THE PLANT

Jonah 4:1 But it greatly displeased Jonah and he became angry.

Jonah may have obeyed God in going where He wanted and in doing what He wanted, but it was with a sour attitude. Sound close to home? God wants more than our obedience – He wants our heart. Jesus asks us, as He did Peter, “Do you love me?” And then He says, “Then tend to my lambs.” We can’t “tend” properly with a sour heart. It must be with a heart of unconditional love. And that is what God sets out to teach Jonah in the book’s final chapter.

As Jonah sits looking over the city of Nineveh waiting to see if God will destroy it or not, God asks Jonah what he asks us when we have a sour attitude: “Do you have good reason to be angry?” And the proper answer, of course, is always “no.” But we still might be angry, and so God has to teach us.

For Jonah he appoints three things: (1) a plant to bring shade – and Jonah is “extremely happy about the plant.” (1:6); then (2) a worm to kill the plant in a night, bringing back the heat of the sun. Then to intensify the lesson God appoints (3) “a scorching east wind” to beat on Jonah’s face so that he wanted to die.

And God again asks, “Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?” Like Jonah, when circumstances don’t go our way and we are not walking closely to God, we get “bitchy” about those circumstances.

Jonah was caring more about the plant and the shade removed than about the multitudes of repentant souls in Nineveh, and so God’s story concludes with this amazing lesson that should dig deep into our hearts and cause us to reassess our priorities.

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?”

What do I care about – really? Oh, I would say God, and family and such. But there are so many things I really care about that so pale in comparison to what God cares about, and wants me to care about - like the salvation of the unsaved around me, or the compassion given to the hurting around me, or the name of Jesus to be boldly spoken by my lips.

I care too much about “plants and shade” and not enough about “souls that matter to God.” And that’s the real message of Jonah, and of Jesus. I so need to “pay forward” to others the unconditional love of God that He has shown to me.

And so, we see the heart of God and of His Son Jesus all over the pages of Jonah.

THE HEART OF GOD

- Compassion for the sailors
- Compassion for His reluctant prophet
- Compassion for the wicked Ninevites
- Compassion for the children and animals of Nineveh
- (“persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand” can best be understood as referring to the children of Nineveh – apparently approximately 120,000)

Jesus was resurrected “from the deep” for you, that you might be reassigned to the “great commission” of caring for souls.

And Jonah is your Old Testament pointer to that truth. Jesus, B.C.