

ADRIAN ROGERS

LEGACY

C O L L E C T I O N



J O N A H

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Jonah

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The Miracle of Missions

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 3, 2002

Main Scripture Text: Jonah 1–4

“Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee. So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord.”

JONAH 3:2–3

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Introduction

The Book of Jonah chapter 1, then look up here. I think most of us remember the story of Jonah—somebody said it is a whale of a story. It really is. You know, it’s not news when a dog bites a man, but it’s news when a man bites a dog. It’s not news, when a man catches a fish, but it’s news when a fish catches a man. Look, if you will, in verse 17: *“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”* (Jonah 1:17).

Now this is a remarkable miracle, and I believe it—I believe it literally. Some say, “Well, was it a fish, or was it a whale, or was it a sea monster? Well, we really don’t know exactly what it was. The Hebrew word is *ketos* if we anglicize it, and it simply means, “a sea monster.” Now the important thing that we have to understand about the story that most of us learned when we were children is that this *sea monster*—whatever it was—was prepared of Almighty God. And he swallowed down Jonah whole, and Jonah is there in his belly for three days and three nights. Someone said, “Well, is that possible?” Well, of course. You know, Jonah was a *minor prophet*, so you could understand how he could get him down and keep him down.

Was it a whale? I did some reading about whales and I found out that, contrary to popular opinion, the great African elephant is not the biggest animal on earth. A whale’s

tongue alone can sometimes weigh more than an entire elephant. As a matter of fact, a great blue whale can weigh as much as 286,000 pounds. That would be—you could put him on one side of the scale, and put 36 elephants on the other side of the scale, or you could put the whale on one side, and put about as many people as are in this auditorium on the other side—well half as many anyway—2,600 people on the other side, just to balance the scales.

And there have been accounts in history where whales have swallowed individuals, and those individuals stayed alive. There was a great sperm whale that was harpooned off of the Falkland Islands in 1899, and a man named Bartley was swallowed by that whale, and they harpooned the whale and his tail lashed up and overturned the boat. One man drowned, Bartley disappeared. Later on they captured the whale, brought him up alongside that ship and were flaying the blubber off, and, when they'd done that, they hoisted the stomach of the whale up on the deck of the ship and noticed some movement on the inside, cut it open, and there was Bartley. He was huddled up in a fetal position, but he was alive, and they washed him down with salt water, and, after a while, he regained consciousness. He was stark raving mad for about two weeks. The third week he regained his consciousness, and was put back to work aboard that ship. And there have been records where—at least this particular record—where a whale swallowed a man and kept him alive.

Dr. Harry Rimmer—that I have loved to read about—told about another man who was swallowed by a great shark. And some men had gone out and harpooned the shark. And the man fell overboard and was swallowed down by that shark. And 48 hours later, they caught the shark, shot him with a deck gun, and the shark was so big they towed the shark to shore and opened him up, to give this man a Christian burial. And to their amazement, he was alive, and his skin was like parchment, all the hair was gone off of his head, he had brown patches on his skin, and he was shown in a museum in London as the 20th-century Jonah. So it is, from the human viewpoint.

We have learned that some people have been swallowed by whales and/or fish, and kept alive. But you missed the point, if you're trying to explain it that way. That doesn't give me any more confidence in the Bible. It wouldn't give me any more confidence in the Bible, if they were to find a skeleton of a whale with Jonah's initials carved on the ribs. The Bible says that God prepared a great fish—God did it—and it's a miracle, pure and simple. And we're going to see that it is a miracle that illustrates the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ from the dead. If God prepared a fish, He could've done one with a bedroom and a refrigerator in it, if He had wanted to. God did what He did.

Why did God do this? Well, there is a great missionary message in the Book of Jonah, and, if you get sidetracked about whether or not a man could be alive for three days and three nights in this story, you're going to miss the main thrust of the story. It is

something that God did to teach a wonderful miracle lesson.

I. We Need to Hear the Missionary Mandate

Now there are four things I want us to learn as we look in the book of Jonah—there are many more than four, but four this morning. But first of all, I want us to learn about the miracle of missions that we need to heed—we need to heed the missionary mandate.

Now what is the missionary mandate? Look in the first three verses, chapter 1, verses 1 through 3: *“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...”*—now, Joppa was the seaport, and I’ve been there, and that’s where Jonah set sail—*“and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish.”* Many people believe that it was to England he was headed—it wasn’t called England at that time—but he’s headed in the direct opposite position. He is going toward the west, and Nineveh is toward the east, so he just turns and goes in the opposite direction. And here’s something very interesting, and, *“...he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it,”*—that is, into the ship—*“to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD”* (Jonah 1:1–3).

Now he is a reluctant missionary. I believe there may be some reluctant missionaries in this building today. God had a great heart of love and mercy, we’re going to see, for Nineveh. Now at first, it seems like God is angry with Nineveh, and God is speaking judgment. God always uses the threat of judgment to bring men to repentance, and I believe, if we had more hell in the pulpit, we’d have less hell in the community. I believe that it is not cruel to preach on Hell and judgment—it is cruel not to do so. And God said to Jonah, “You go and preach a message of judgment to these people.”

But as we’re going to see in this story, God has a heartbeat for the world. God had much rather forgive and save than to judge. Now what is God saying to the people of Bellevue Baptist Church this morning, and what is God saying to me? Same thing He said in Mark chapter 16, verse 15: *“Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature”* (Mark 16:15). God wants everybody saved. And to say *Christian* is to say *missionary*.

Now there are some people who don’t believe that God wants everybody saved, who believe that God has a select few that are going to be saved, and He does not necessarily purpose that all be saved. But the Bible says we’re to preach the gospel to every creature; the Bible says that the Lord is *“not willing that any should perish”* (2 Peter 3:9). God wants the earth to be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as waters that cover the sea (Habakkuk 2:14). And Jonah’s life was not his own to do with as he would please, and my life is not my own to do with as I please. I told the

Lord, as a teen, “Lord, whatever you want me to do, I will do it.” I made a contract with God, as it were, signed my name at the bottom of the paper, and said, “Lord, I’m yours, whatever you want me to do.” My life is not my own. And every mother’s child here ought to do the same thing.

Now sometimes I’ve had to be reminded about that. Joyce and I had a motor home—we were partners in a motor home before I came to Bellevue Baptist Church—and we were going up to New England for a vacation. Actually we’d not made any reservations, and we really didn’t even have a map we were following; we were kind of following just the hood ornament on that motor home. Just, well, they don’t have hoods, do they? We were, anyway, just going as we would, and I was contacted by the Bellevue pulpit committee. We were at a campground—the KOA campground there in Lynchburg, Virginia—and I got a phone call when I called home, and they said, “Dad, there are some people there at Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee that want you to call them. They’re a pulpit committee.” And I said to Joyce, I said, “Well, I’m not going to do that.” I said, “Well, I’m not interested in going to Memphis, Tennessee. I’m right where God wants me.” And my daughter Gayle was on board that motor home, and I just headed out, you know, to go further up the east coast. And Gayle said to me, “Daddy, remember Jonah? Remember Jonah?” And I tell you, she was kind of kidding, because that stabbed my heart, because I thought, “My life is not my own just to decide what I want to do with it, or even without praying.” “Daddy, remember Jonah?” And I did. And look! Here I am! It’s amazing what God will do when we say, “Lord, my life is not my own.”

*I said, “Let me walk in the field;”
He said, “Nay, walk in the town.”
I said, “There are no flowers there.”
He said, “No flowers, but a crown.”
I said, “But the skies are black.
There is nothing but noise and din;”
But He wept as he sent me back.
”There is more,” He said, “there is sin.”
I said, “But the air is thick
And fogs are veiling the sun.”
He answered, “Yet souls are sick,
And souls in the dark undone.”
I said, “I shall miss the light,
And friends will miss me, they say.”
He answered, “Choose, to-night.*

*If I am to miss you, or they.”
I pleaded for time to be given.
He said, “Is it hard to decide?
It will not seem hard in Heaven
To have followed the steps of your Guide.”
I cast one look on the field,
Then set my face to the town.
He said, “My child, do you yield?
Will you leave the flowers for a crown?”
Then into His hand went mine,
And into my heart came He,
And I walked in the light divine,
The path I had feared to see.
—GEORGE MACDONALD*

When we were in Florida, I lived in a grapefruit grove, just a few steps from the beautiful Indian River, where I had a little sailboat down there. But I have never been happier in my life than where I am here in this glorious, wonderful church. I am so glad that I had enough sense to listen to the will of God. Never be afraid of the will of God. Don't run from God, because if you do, I'm gonna tell you one thing—two things.

A. Jonah's Disobedience Was at Great Cost to Others

Number one: your disobedience is going to be at great cost to other people. If you read this book of Jonah, you're going to find out that there was a storm. Now old Jonah paid the fare, he went down to sleep, everything's right: his ship's leaving on time, his bags are packed, he remembered his socks, everything is there. He goes down there, he's getting it all—he says, “Now I've got it all settled. I'm going this way. I'm going to have my own life. It's my life and I'm going to live it.” But at that time, the wind began to churn and snort, and the great Mediterranean began to heave, and there came a great storm.

Look at it in verse 3: *“But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa”* (Jonah 1:3). But now, verse 4: *“But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken. Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man unto his god”* (Jonah 1:4–5). Now what does that mean? It means that, when Jonah was out of the will of God, others suffered.

I've just been reading about a pastor who fell into moral difficulty, and I thought, “How tragic! I know that man. What a dear man!” But I thought not only of the cost to him, but I thought about the cost to his family, and the cost to his church.

And if you go out in the field, and you see a great tree out there, and maybe it has a

rotten heart, and when it falls, that great and mighty tree, it just pulls down all the little saplings that are all around it. Any man of God—any woman of God—any father, any mother, anybody that gets out of the will of God, not only do they pay the fare for themselves, but friend, those around them are going to suffer. I am telling you, I believe that there will be souls in Hell because of your disobedience if you disobey God.

Now you say, “No, I don’t believe that.” Oh? Ezekiel said, “When I say to the wicked, if you’ve warned the wicked of his way and you don’t warn that man, then he’ll die in his sin, but his blood will I require at his hand” (Ezekiel 33:8). I’d hate to meet the Lord Jesus with bloody hands, and I sometimes wonder if I have been as obedient to Him as I ought to be. These sailors aboard this ship were in grave danger because of this disobedient missionary who would not listen to the way of God.

B. Jonah’s Disobedience Was at Great Cost to Himself

But not only was it at great cost to those around Jonah, there was a great cost to Jonah himself. Jonah is going to suffer incredibly because he is running from the Lord. He’s got a *whale house* for a *jailhouse*, and he’s going to be spending the night on a *foam blubber mattress* before long, because he has run from God.

II. We Need to Preach the Missionary Message

Here’s the missionary mandate. God says, “You go, Jonah, and you preach the Word that I have given you.” But number two: not only do we need to hear and heed the missionary mandate, but, friend, we need to preach the missionary message. Did you know the message of missions—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ—is in the Book of Jonah? Did you know this?

Listen here to Jonah chapter 1, beginning in verse 11: *“Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee...”*—they’d found out that Jonah was the bad guy on board, and it was because of Jonah that they were having this storm—*“What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, 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. So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her 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”* (Jonah 1:11–17).

Did you know that all of this tells us what the missionary message is? Do you know what the missionary message is? Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. Now here's a verse I want you to put in your margin: Matthew chapter 12, and beginning in verse 40: *"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."* Now the word for *whale* here—in case you're remembering what I already said—is more of a generic term, does not necessarily mean a whale, but the great fish's belly. *"So shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here"* (Matthew 12:40–41).

Now that's an amazing passage of Scripture. Look at it again. *"As Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man"*—Jesus, is gonna—*"be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"* (Matthew 12:40). This speaks of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why we say the whole Bible is full of Jesus. The whole Bible is a gospel message. If you read the Book of Nahum, it's a gospel book. If you read the Book of Habakkuk, it's a gospel book. If you read the Book of Jonah, it is a gospel book.

What is the message of Jonah? What is the missionary message? It is the missionary message of the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jonah here becomes a picture—a type—of the Lord. Jonah died that the others might live. Jonah is sacrificed—many exegetes believe that Jonah actually died. He spoke of himself as being in Sheol—that God resuscitated him, brought him back to life. Whether he was in a comatose state, or whether he literally died, don't miss the point that here, Jonah is swallowed up by this great whale that represents the grave, and, for three days and three nights, he's there.

I have visited Rome, and gone down to the catacombs in Rome, and walked through those catacombs. And you will see crosses on the catacombs. You will see the *ichthus*, the fish. The one thing that you'll often see is a whale—a whale because the whale speaks of the resurrection—and these early Christians knew that the Book of Jonah typified the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. It's a picture of a substitutionary death and a biblical bodily resurrection.

Notice Jonah didn't jump overboard; they threw him overboard—because Jesus was crucified for our sins, and you and I had a part in that crucifixion. Now before they threw him overboard, they cast forth their wares. They thought, "You know, we don't need to throw him overboard; we'll just lighten the ship." So many people do that—they say, "Well, I don't need the death of Jesus Christ for me. I can just get rid of my swearing, and my killing, and my drinking, and my lust, and my lies." You can't lighten the ship; there's no way that you can do that. You're a sinner by nature—by birth—but they tried

by getting rid of things. But that was no way.

And then, the Bible said they rode hard to bring it to the shore. They labored, but again, there was no way that they could do this. All of their toil, their sweat, their tears, was not enough. And then, finally, they threw Jonah overboard. Look in verse 15: “*So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging*” (Jonah 1:15). Now this writhing, roiling, boiling sea represents the judgment of God. Lightening the ship did no good; rowing hard did no good; but, when Jonah was cast forth, when he became the sacrifice—when he’s thrown overboard, when he has a vicarious death, as it were—then immediately the sea ceases. The only way—the only way—that you’re gonna receive any peace from God is through the substitutionary death of the Lord Jesus Christ. He hath made peace with the blood of His cross (Colossians 1:20). And in one moment, more was accomplished than all of their toiling, and all of their lightening of the ship.

Now the Bible says, “It’s not by works of righteousness that we’ve done, but according to His mercy that He saved us” (Titus 3:5), and I know you’re glad of that. But not only do you see the substitutionary death of Jesus in the book of Jonah, you see, friend, His supernatural resurrection. The Bible says, in Jonah 2, verse 10, “*And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land*” (Jonah 2:10). Ready? Up and out, and here comes Jonah. It was clearly a miracle. “Adrian, you believe it?” “Yes, I believe it.” “Why do you believe it?” “Cause I believe in God.” I don’t have any difficulty with miracles. Acts chapter 26, verse 8: “*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*” (Acts 26:8).

I’ve told you before about Lee Scarborough, who was the great president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He preached on this story, and on his way home, his little son asked him, said, “Daddy, do you really believe that? Do you really believe that story of Jonah and the whale? Dad, that seems awful hard to believe.” And the dad said, “Now son, I want to ask you, if God could make a man out of nothing to begin with, and if God could make a whale or a fish out of nothing to begin with, don’t you believe that God could prepare a great fish to swallow a man and keep him alive for three days and three nights.” Little guy said, “Well if you’re gonna bring God into it, that’s different.” Well, you don’t mind if I bring God into this, do you?

“*With God all things are possible*” (Matthew 19:26). “*Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead?*” (Acts 26:8). Once you get past Genesis 1:1: “*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth*” (Genesis 1:1), you’ll have no difficulty with miracles.

III. We Need to Remember the Missionary Miracle

Now here’s the third thing. We need to remember the missionary miracle. What is the

miracle in this story? Friend, the miracle in this story is not Jonah and the great fish/sea monster/whale, or whatever it was; the great missionary miracle is the grace of God. Oh, how God's grace is so rich! Think of God's grace to Jonah. Look, if you will, in chapter 3 and verse 1: "*And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time*" (Jonah 3:1). You would think that God would say, "I'll get somebody else," 'cause you know God is the God of the second chance.

Now let me just pull over here for just a moment. There are some of you in your fifties and your sixties, and you're saying—maybe seventies—you're saying, "You know, when I was young, God called me to the ministry, and I didn't answer," or "God told me to do this thing or that thing"—it may not have been the ministry—"but I didn't obey." Let me tell you something, friend: God is the God of second chances. For some people, this is their favorite verse in the Bible: "*The word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time*" (Jonah 3:1). If you'll go through the Bible, you'll find the doctrine of the second chance all the way through the Bible, and it shows the miracle of God's grace. God is not a God that holds grudges. I don't care what you've done, God's grace is sufficient for you. Though you've been running from God in the past, though you say, "I've missed the will of God," it's not too late for you.

You think about—Jeremiah was in the potter's shop, and Jeremiah saw the potter make a pot, and the pot was reluctant and stiff, and it was misformed; and the potter took that clay, and made another pot the second time. It's the doctrine of the second chance.

I read in the Bible about a man named John Mark, set out to be a missionary, and he messed up so much that Paul wouldn't even take him back on the missionary journey, but his uncle Barnabas took him back again. Later on, Paul said—had to say about Mark—"Bring him with you, he's profitable unto me" (2 Timothy 4:11). That is, God took this boy and gave him a second chance. As a matter of fact, I'm glad He did, because we have the Gospel of Mark in the Bible.

I read in the Bible about Simon Peter. Simon Peter cursed, and swore, and denied the Lord Jesus Christ, even before the rooster crowed. And many of us would've said, "Well, I'm finished with Peter, cursing in front of a teenage girl, denying the Lord Jesus, that old hypocrite, talking about going with Jesus to prison, and to death." But friend, he became the mighty apostle of Pentecost.

I'm so grateful that God has given me so many second chances. Friend, listen. He is the God of the second chance: "*The word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time*" (Jonah 3:1). But I'm also grateful that not only did God give Jonah a second chance, God gave Nineveh a second chance. Listen. Nineveh was ripe for judgment. America is ripe for judgment. And I believe that God had much rather forgive than to judge.

Let me give you a great verse here: Jeremiah 18 and verse 7—God said, “In what instant I speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and pull down, and destroy it if that nation will repent”—God says—“I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them” (Jeremiah 18:7–8). You see, they repented. Listen to Matthew chapter 12, verse 41—Jesus said, *“The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas”* (Matthew 12:41). God forgave Nineveh.

Nineveh was one of the most wicked cities on the face of the earth. As a matter of fact, that was part of Jonah’s problem. Jonah hated the Ninevites like some hate Al Qaeda in this generation. They thought they were unspeakably immoral. When the army of the Ninevites would march, a little town would be in the path of that marching army, and the people in that town would sometimes—historians tell us—commit suicide rather than to fall into the hands of the brutal Ninevites. And they had been especially worrisome and hurtful to Israel. And that’s the reason Jonah didn’t want to preach to them. He didn’t want them to have revival. We’re going to see more about that in just a moment. But God forgave.

In all of the history of revivals, I don’t believe there’s been another revival like the revival that was at Nineveh. The king proclaimed a fast, everybody turned to God, and the whole city—a city about the size of Memphis, Tennessee—turned to God in repentance and faith. And it was great in iniquity, it was great in antiquity—it was founded by old Nimrod himself, who’s a type of the anti-Christ—yet this city came to a mighty revival.

Now Jonah had preached, “In forty days Nineveh will be destroyed,” and yet it wasn’t destroyed. Was he a false prophet? No, no. Had they not repented, they would’ve been destroyed. Somebody asked Dr. G. Campbell Morgan this question. He said, “Is God capricious? Does God just operate according to whim? I mean, God said He’s gonna do one thing, and He did another. Does God change?” Dr. Morgan said, “No, God doesn’t change, God’s laws are immutable. But God is like a weathervane, and, when the wind blows, that weathervane invariably, by fixed laws, points in the direction of the wind.”

Now friend, the wind can change. The weathervane only registers what the wind is doing. But the weathervane never changes. Who changed in this story? Not God. The Ninevites changed in this story. And God will show Himself merciful to those who repent—always, that’s a fixed law. God will show Himself in judgment to those who do not repent—always, that is a fixed law. And I’m so grateful for the mercy of God, the grace of God. And I believe with all of my heart, anybody here today—you think that it’s too late for you to be saved, or that you’ve done too much, or that God is finished with you—friend, I want to tell you, He is not. There is a God of grace. If you’re a missionary, and you’ve failed; God called you, and you failed; preacher, and you failed; or a layman,

and you failed; there's a God of the second chance. If you're a sinner, and you think that it's too late for you to be saved, no, it is not too late for you to be saved. If God saved Nineveh, He'll save you.

IV. We Need to Understand the Missionary Motive

Now the final thing I want you to see this morning: We need to understand the missionary motive. What is the missionary motive? Notice, in Jonah chapter 4 and verse 1: *"But it displeased Jonah exceedingly"* (Jonah 4:1). What displeased him? This great revival, people turning to the Lord. Now when I preach I like to see a lot of results. But Jonah didn't like the results; he was displeased, 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."*—now we're going to understand why he ran from the Lord—*"for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil. Therefore now, O LORD, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live"* (Jonah 4:2–3). He said, "I'm so sick I wish I could die." Why? Because God was blessing the wrong people.

The problem here was that, while God loved the Ninevites, Jonah did not love the Ninevites. As I've told you, they were exceedingly wicked. And God now begins to do a little psychology on Jonah. He wants to teach Jonah a lesson. So look, if you will, in verse 4. Chapter 4, verse 4: *"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 him a booth,"*—he bought, he built him a little pastorium there—*"and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a gourd,"*—that means a gourd vine—*"and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shadow over his head, to deliver him from his grief. So Jonah was exceeding glad of the gourd"* (Jonah 4:4–6).

Now here is a city out there that's just repented; but here's Jonah up there on the hillside, and he's got this little booth, and this gourd vine comes up to air condition it. And of course, the sun is very hot there in the Middle East, and Jonah now begins to look at that beautiful gourd vine and think how wonderful this is. But now, notice what happens. Chapter 4, verse 7: *"But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered"* (Jonah 4:7). Now you see, God's preparing all kinds of things. God prepares a fish. God prepares a wind. God prepares a gourd. God prepares a worm. You see, God is teaching Jonah a great lesson. And *"God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted,"*—he almost had a sun stroke here—*"and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live."* (Jonah 4:8). And here's Jonah now; here he is sitting

up in his little booth, a little gourd vine over him; and now, he's so upset because his gourd vine has been eaten up by a worm, and the sun is beating on his head.

Now here's what God says to him—and I want you to listen to it, because we're getting right down to the World Missions Offering, we're getting right down to what God wants you to do. Look in verse 9: *“And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. Then said the LORD, Thou hast had pity on the gourd, for the which thou hast not laboured, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night:”—*that is, it's here today and gone tomorrow—*“and should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?”* (Jonah 4:9–11). When he says “six-score thousand,” he's not talking about the grown people, He's talking about the little children, little children in that city who don't even know the difference between their right hand and their left hand.

What's He saying to them? He's saying—look folks—He's saying this: “Jonah, you've got your values all upside down. You're attached to this little place where you live, you're attached to your comfort, and out here is a city, a city destined for judgment. And you're all upset, Jonah, because I've had pity on these people.”

Conclusion

Friend, let me ask you a question. What is it that is your little gourd vine? What is it that means more to you than lost souls? What is it that keeps you from letting go and rejoicing in world missions? Let me give you a little test, see if you're more interested in gourds than souls. What do you really trust in more—the Word of God or your bank account? What do you admire the most—the lifestyle of the rich and the famous, or these missionaries that come? Who do you really look up to? Who do you really admire? Is there anything—anything—that you would not be willing to give up, if you knew God wanted you to do it? Ask yourself this question. Here's this poor, pitiful prophet, more interested in a vine than in lost souls. Did you know that while I'm preaching on missions this morning, some of you are thinking about what you're gonna have for lunch? You're wondering about what you're gonna watch this afternoon on television.

There was a great orator—his name was Demosthenes. Demosthenes was a Greek. He learned how to speak as a boy by going down to the seashore and putting pebbles in his mouth, and speaking to the roaring ocean, so he could articulate clearly. He was a man with a brilliant mind. One day, he was speaking to the people of Greece. He had a great audience; but, they were paying no attention to him, their minds were wandering. He was speaking to them about matters of life and death. But he stopped.

He said, “I want to tell you a story.” He said, “Once, there was a man who had a

bundle of sticks, and he had to cross a mountain, and he was carrying those sticks on his back. And a man beside him said, 'Why don't you rent my donkey, and let my donkey carry those sticks over the mountain for you?' And so they bargained, and the man rented the donkey. And so the man who owned the donkey went with him so he could have the donkey back. The sticks were laid on the back of the donkey, and over the mountain they went. It was exceedingly hot. They decided they would rest awhile, and the man who rented the donkey sat down in the shade of the donkey. The owner of the donkey said, 'I'm sorry, sir, but you'll have to get up and move. I'm gonna sit in the shade of the donkey.' And the man said, 'No, you can't sit in the shade of the donkey. I have rented the donkey. I'm gonna sit in the shade of the donkey.' But the man who owned the donkey said, 'No, I rented you the donkey, I did not rent you the shade; and the shade of the donkey belongs to me. I only rented you the donkey.' The man said, 'Well, the shade comes with the donkey,' and they got in a big argument about it."

And then, Demosthenes just turned and walked off the stage. They said, "Come back! Come back! Don't leave us there! Who was right? The man that owned the donkey, or the man that rented the donkey—who was right?" And he came back and said, "Listen to me. I was talking to you about matters of life and death, and your mind was off wandering on other things. And now you clamor to know who owns the shade of a donkey."

You know what's wrong with the modern 21st-century modern Christian? Friend, we're like Jonah—interested in gourd vines rather than souls. We're more interested in who owns the shade of a donkey than whether souls are gonna go to Hell or not. We need to have the heartbeat that God Almighty has. I tell you, when I prepared this message, God convicted me. He said, "Adrian, you don't love souls as you ought." And I've redirected my life, and I want to ask you to redirect yours. I want to bring my life into a burning focus. I want to hear the missionary mandate. I believe the missionary miracle. I believe the missionary message is that Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again—just like Jonah came out of the mouth of that fish. And I believe the missionary motive is to let my heart beat with God's, who is full of grace and compassion.

Would you bow your heads in prayer? Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Now if you're a Christian, would you pray, "Lord Jesus, give me a fresh burden for souls. Help me to be concerned. Lord, may the things that move Your heart move mine."

If there's some gourd vine you're in love with, will you let go of it? I'm not saying that God doesn't want you to have nice things; but, God doesn't want you to have anything that you're unwilling to release for Him.

And if you're not saved, let me tell you that Jesus will save you, today. The same God that saved the Ninevites is the God who will save you. It doesn't matter what

you've done. *There's no one so bad he cannot be saved, and no one so good he need not be saved.*

Father God, I pray that You'll speak to every heart this morning, and bless us as we give this invitation. In Jesus' holy name. Amen.

The Miracle of Missions

By Adrian Rogers

Date Preached: March 5, 1989

Main Scripture Text: Jonah 1:1–3

*“Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it;
for their wickedness is come up before me.”*

JONAH 1:2

Outline

Introduction

- I. The Missionary Mandate
 - II. The Missionary Message
 - III. The Missionary Miracle
- Conclusion

Introduction

Would you take God’s precious Word and be finding the book of Jonah. That’s in the minor prophets in the Old Testament. And if will be of any help to you, it’s just before the book of Micah. But find the book of Jonah. Now you may not know it, but Jonah is a great missionary book. I suppose the greatest missionary message in the Old Testament is found in the book of Jonah.

Today, we’re speaking on this subject: “The Miracle of Missions.” “The Miracle of Missions.” Jonah 1:1: “Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh. Arise, go to Nineveh...” Now right away you can tell that it is a missionary story.

And, by the way, like all missions, it is an intriguing story. We all know that it is one of the most interesting stories in all of God’s Word. Now it’s not news when a dog bites a man, but when a man bites a dog, we could say that’s news. It’s not news when a man catches a fish, but when a fish catches a man, that’s news. But this is more than a whale of a story. It is a story with a message, a missionary message that we need to hear today. What a wonderful, wonderful story, a miracle story of missions.

Now people have raced their theological and biological motors trying to figure out whether or not this is a literal story or a parable, whether it could happen, whether it could not have happened. I believe it happened. It happened literally. And I believe it just like it is written right here. And some people have searched high and low to find out if there is indeed a whale big enough to swallow a man and keep him alive. We have

assumed, I suppose, that the great African elephant is the biggest animal known. That is not so at all. A whale's tongue of a great blue whale may weigh more than an African elephant, just the tongue. As a matter of fact, in his book, "Mister Blonde," the story of great whales by George Blonde, said that a great blue whale can weigh as much as 186,000 lbs. How much is that? Well, if you were to put a great blue whale on one side of the scales, it would take thirty-six elephants on the other side just to make the scales balance. That's how big that elephant is. Or it would take a town of about 2,500 people on one side to balance the scales if you put the whale on the other side. These whales grow to enormous size, and sometimes in a very short time. I've learned that a baby whale can gain as much as ten pounds an hour. I've done that. Two hundred and forty pounds a day. Whales are enormous creatures. And whales have been known to swallow people and keep them alive.

Sidlow Baxter, who has preached here in our pulpit, tells, back in 1899, of a whaling ship called The Star of the East. It was off the Falklands, and they were trying to capture a whale. And they had harpooned the whale. And in the midst of all of this, the, the whale kicked his tail and some men were splashed overboard. And one man was rescued; the other man was swallowed by the whale. They ultimately captured the whale, brought it alongside The Star of the East, the great ship. They went down with their shovels and axes and, and began to remove the blubber from this whale. Of course they couldn't hoist it on board. Finally they came to the stomach of the whale. They put a winch on it and hoisted it on board, and they saw a movement inside the stomach of that whale. They cut it open and there was that man that had been swallowed doubled up, unconscious. And they revived him with sea water and took him down to the captain's quarters. For two weeks he was a raving lunatic. But with kindness and care they treated him, and after a while he was able, this man, to come back to his senses. And his name was Mr. Bartley. They said that from there on, his skin had a strange yellowish-brown color wherever the gastric juices had gotten to him. Great patches of hair were missing from his head wherever the gastric juices had gotten to him. He was a hideous creature, but he had lived. And he himself said that he might have died of starvation inside the whale, but he would not have died for lack of air because he said that he was able to breathe. And he only passed out because of sheer fright and shock.

I remember reading also where Dr. Harry Reemer, who is a delightful and interesting writer, tells of some men one time who had harpooned a great shark. Not a whale, but a shark this time. And the shark was a monstrous thing. And, again, in trying to capture and to subdue that animal, one of the men fell overboard. Again, was ingested by the shark. Then the shark broke loose. Later on, they spotted the same shark. Shot him this time with a high-powered gun, and hauled the carcass to the beach, opened him up to

try to extradite the man to give him a Christian funeral, a burial, and found out he, too, was very much alive. Took him to a hospital. Treated him. He became known as the Twentieth Century Jonah and was on display, in the London Museum.

But, you see, to try to find a fish big enough to swallow a man misses the point. You see, the Bible says God prepared a great fish. God prepared a great fish. And, actually, in the Old Testament it's called a fish; in the New Testament a whale, but the Hebrew word is *ketos*, which means "sea monster." What it was I don't know. Maybe you've never seen one like it, never will, but God, the same God who made the world, prepared a great fish. So don't worry about the possibility. You just believe in God. Just accept it.

I remember reading about Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryant in the famous Scopes Trial, the monkey trial. Clarence Darrow was a gifted lawyer, and he tried to confuse William Jennings Bryant who was an ardent Christian by asking him a question, hoping that he would make a fool of himself. He said, "Well, you believe all of the Bible?" William Jennings Bryant said, "I certainly do." He said, "You believe that story of Jonah and the whale?" He said, "I certainly do." He said, "Do you believe that Jonah swallowed a whale," hoping he would say, "I certainly do." But listening carefully, he said, "No, I don't believe that Jonah swallowed a whale. I believe the whale swallowed Jonah." But he said, "I want you to know if the Bible said Jonah swallowed the whale, I would have believed it."

Now, dear friend, I like that. That's, that's really wonderful. You see, listen. The, the question is not how great a fish. The question is how great a God. Okay. That's it. So we just simply accept that God is able to do everything. But so many times we get confused about the fish story and we forget the missionary story. The book of Jonah is a story of a miracle, but it is a missionary story. It is the story of the miracle of missions. So I want you to notice with me this morning, as we look into this wonderful and delightful and insightful book, three things.

I. The Missionary Mandate

First of all, I want you to see what I'm going to call the missionary mandate, the missionary mandate. Notice again Jonah 1:1-3: "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: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."

Now when God told Jonah to go to Nineveh, which was great, a city great in enormity, great in antiquity, and great in iniquity, when He said go to that city, God was showing that He is the God of missions.

Now Jonah was a prophet, but he was a prophet to his own people. He was a patriot and loved his own people and loved his home, but he had nothing but contempt and hatred for the Ninevites because of their wickedness. And he really had no desire to preach the gospel of God to these people because, first of all, he thought they didn't deserve it, and he wanted God to judge them, and he was afraid that God might indeed bless them.

But in this story, when God said, "Go to Nineveh," we see right away the heart of God. Are you listening? It is a heart of boundless love. God wants to lift, to love, to bless all the nations of this world, and that includes the cruel nations. That includes the oppressive nations. That includes Iran. It includes Libya. It includes Red China. It includes Soviet Russia. All of the people of the world—the ignorant people, the downtrodden people, the, the misguided people, the sick people, the suffering people, the perishing nations of the world till the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as waters that cover the sea.

God said to Jonah, "Jonah, go," but Jonah did not want to go. Now I want, I want you to understand this. Jonah did not get into trouble because he went; he got into trouble because he did not go. Some of you mommas don't want your children to be missionaries. And you know why you don't want your children to be missionaries? You say, "I don't want them to go over there in all that danger." Isn't that right? Sure. "All that danger, I don't want them to go over there in all that danger."

May I tell you where the safest place is? In the middle of the will of God. I hope you believe that. I hope you believe that Peter was safer on the waves with Jesus than he was in the boat without the Lord Jesus Christ. The safest place and the happiest place is in the center of the will of God. Now that doesn't mean there may not be difficulty. It doesn't mean there's going to be all honey and no bees. But I tell you, if Jesus is there, that's the place you need to be. There is no higher place than right in the will of God. It was when Jonah refused to listen to God and to answer God that that's where he got into trouble. Jonah's life was not his own to do with as he wanted.

I don't know whether God is calling you to be a foreign missionary. I don't know that. And, very frankly, that's not the question today. Do you know what the question today is? Are you willing if He calls you? That's the question. Isn't, isn't that the question? If He calls, are you willing? He said, "Well, He, He's not calling me because I am eighty years old and got arthritis." That's not the question. Are you willing if He calls you? That's the question. You say, "Well, He's not calling me because I don't have the education." That's not the question, not at all. The question is, are you willing? That's the question. You say, "Well, He couldn't call me because they're not appointing missionaries wi, in my category." That's not even the question. The question is, are you willing? You can't answer anything else until you answer that question. And, very

frankly, many of us have not come to that place where we say...you know, we give God some excuse.

I've thought about this when I prepared this message. I said, "Adrian, are you willing?" "Well, Lord, I can't go. I'm the Pastor of Bellevue Baptist Church. We're in the middle of a building program. It would be unthinkable." It's not unthinkable to say, "Yes, Lord, if You call, I'll go," whatever it is. Whenever, wherever. Are you willing? That's the question. Now some of us don't want to obey Jesus.

I said, "Let me walk in the field."

He said, "No, walk in the town."

I said, "But there are no flowers there."

He said, "No flowers, but a crown."

I said, "The air is thick and fogs are veiling the sun."

He said, "Souls are sick and souls in the dark undone."

I said, "But the skies are black and there's nothing but noise and din."

And he wept as he sent me back. "There is more," he said, "there is sin."

I said, "I shall miss the light and friends will miss me, they say."

He said, "Choose tonight and I to miss you or they."

I pleaded for time to be given. He said, "Is it hard to decide?"

It will not seem hard in heaven to have followed the steps of your guide."

I cast one look at the field and set my face to the town.

He said, "My child, do you yield? Will you give up the flowers for a crown?"

*Then into his hand went mine, and into my heart came he,
and I walked in a light divine, the paths that I had feared to see.*

—GEORGE MACDONALD

Friend, that's where the flowers of grace and the light of God's word is, just simply in the will of God.

A young pastor came to a church with seven hundred members, and they were having a reception for him. And there was a lovely lady, well meaning, who came by and took the pastor by the hand and said, "We'll be praying for you. You've got a difficult job trying to please seven hundred people." He said, "My dear lady, I shall not be trying to please seven hundred people. I shall be trying to please one, my Lord and Master. And if I please Him, that ought to be good enough for the others."

We need to stop trying to please ourselves, and we need to stop trying to please other people, and say, "Here am I, Lord. Send me." Now He may not send you across the ocean. It might be a little lady on a park bench. It might be an elderly grandmother lonely. It might be a little boy whose dad has left his mother, a little boy whose heart is broken. It might be a next door neighbor who is sick, lonely, hurting. Are you willing? Are you ready? What is the missionary mandate? Mark 16:15: "...Go ye into all the

world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” “Arise, and go to Nineveh,” whatever your Nineveh is.

II. The Missionary Message

Second thing I want you to see. Not only the missionary mandate, but I want you to see the missionary message, because here in the book of Jonah we see the gospel of Jesus Christ presented clearly and plainly. And the missionary message is found right here. What is the missionary message? The missionary message is the gospel of Christ. And what is the gospel of Christ? Here it is. “How that Christ died for our sins, how that He was buried, how that He was raised again the third day according to the power of God and by the power of God.” That is the missionary message.

Now that’s tucked away right here in the book of Jonah. You say, “Are you certain?” Absolutely certain! Put in your Bible margin there in the book of Jonah these verses: Matthew 12, verses 40 and 41. Listen to what Jesus said. Jesus said, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale’s belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here.” Jesus said that Jonah was a picture, a prophecy, a type, an illustration, a foregleam of Himself. As Jonah, so Jesus. As Jonah, so Jesus. That’s what Jesus Christ Himself said in Matthew 12:40 and 41.

How does Jonah picture the Lord Jesus Christ? You say, “How could anybody who was as disobedient and sinful as Jonah was, who ran from the Lord, picture the Lord Jesus Christ?” Easy. Jesus Christ became sin for us. “God hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” Jesus Christ was not a sinner, but He took our sin. And so here is Jonah picturing the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now what is the gospel? What is the gospel? The gospel is the vicarious death and the victorious resurrection of Jesus. That is the gospel, right?—the vicarious death and the victorious resurrection. I want you to see how that is pictured here in the book of Jonah.

First of all, I want you to see the vicarious death of the Lord Jesus as it is pictured. You see, Jonah pictures the Lord Jesus Christ. Those people aboard this ship represent lost humanity. The vessel humanity plunging in that storm through waves of judgment, destined for eternal destruction on the reefs of judgment. That’s what this all pictures. And here is Jonah. There’s a storm and something has to be done with the storm or else they’re going to perish. And the only way that that storm can be quieted, are you listening, is by a substitutionary death. One person must die for all. It’s very clear.

Look, if you will, in chapter 1, verse 10: “Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and

said unto him—that is, to Jonah—Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because they had told him, he had, they had told, he had told them. Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee”—now watch this—that the sea may be calm unto us? For the sea was wrought, and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is come upon you. Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea was wrought, and was tempestuous against them. Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, 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 hath pleased thee.”—underscore that—“So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and”—watch it—“the sea ceased from her raging. Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.”

Now do you see it? Do you see it? They’re trying to bring the ship ashore. They’re trying to row. There’s nothing that can be done. Jonah said, “There’s only one way that this storm of judgment can be stopped, and that is for you to cast me overboard.” Jonah had to be willing. He volunteered the information. Furthermore, it had to be done by their hand. Jonah could not jump overboard. Jesus Christ was not a suicide, nor was He a martyr. He was a substitutionary sacrifice. And yet it was done according to the will and the plan of God at the end of verse 14. “...O LORD, thou hast done as it pleased thee.” “It hath pleased the Lord to bruise the Lord Jesus Christ. And yet with wicked hands we have taken Him and crucified Him.” His guilt is upon us. Willingly, He did it. Thrown into the sea of judgment to be devoured for us. That’s a picture of the substitutionary death of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Now these people on this ship are like the peoples of this world. They’re trying to do other things, but there’s no way out. Look, if you will, in chapter 1, verse 5: “Then the mariners were afraid, and cried every man to his god...” When, my dear friend, the gods of this world cannot save, “...and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them...” They started throwing things overboard. They thought, *Well, maybe we can survive. Maybe we can make it through this storm if we’ll just simply throw everything overboard.* Like so many people today, so many people who sit in darkness, whether it be across the ocean or here in our city. They try to lighten the ship. They’re throwing things overboard. And they think is they can just quit lying and quit stealing and quit swearing and quit lusting, if they can just quit these things, if they can lighten the ship, they can make it. But reformation will never save a soul. Friend, you’ll never lighten your ship by just simply trying to get rid of those bad things in your life and casting things overboard.

And then, you know what else they tried? Look, if you will, in chapter 1 and verse 13:

“And nevertheless the men rowed—and notice—they rowed hard...” See them with the perspiration on their brow. See them with their muscles aching. See them with their backs bent to the oars, rowing so hard, but to no avail, to no avail. The storm is still raging. The ship is still sinking. But when Jonah is cast into the foaming mouth of that sea, immediately it stops, immediately. What could not be done by reformation and works was done in an instant when one man became a substitutionary sacrifice for them all. Dear friend, the Bible says it’s not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us. Christ died for us. That’s tucked away here in the book of Jonah. For as Jonah, so Jesus. That’s what Jesus said. But not only His vicarious death. Also, His victorious resurrection is pictured here. Look, if you will, in the book of Jonah chapter 1, verse 17: “Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish (how long?) three days and three nights.” Do you think that was by happenstance? No! How long was Jesus in the grave? Three days and three nights. “As Jonah was in the belly of the whale,” Jesus said, “so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” It pictures the resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. That’s the reason why I, I, I don’t have any difficulty with the story of Jonah, whether or not it was a miracle. Friend, if I can believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, I can believe in a whale swallowing a man and keeping him down, see. I have no difficulty with that. You see, if I can believe in God, the God who flung out the stars, the God who scooped up the seas and heaped up the mountains and made man from the dust of the earth, the man who painted the rainbow, the God who painted the rainbow in the sky, the God who fashioned the wings of the butterfly, the God of heaven and earth is the God I worship, and He is the God of resurrection.

What is the missionary message? The missionary message is this to the people of this world: these who are trying to lighten the ship and these who are rowing so hard, these who are heartbroken, these who are downcast. What is the message? Christ died for your sins. He was buried. He was raised again the third day by the power of God. May I submit to you, dear friend, there’s not another message like that in this world? That is the missionary message. And that’s tucked away here in the book of Jonah to teach us that this world, oh, this world needs Jesus.

*Friends all around me are trying to find
what the heart yearns for by sin undermined.
I have the secret, I know where 'tis found.
Only true pleasures in Jesus abound.*

—AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Jesus is all this world needs today. We need to tell them about Jesus, about Jesus.

III. The Missionary Miracle

Third thing I want you to see. I want you to see not only the missionary mandate—“Arise, and go to Nineveh,” I want you to see not only the missionary message—the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But I want you to see what I’m going to call the missionary miracle. Do you know what the greatest miracle was? The greatest miracle was not Jonah staying down three days and three nights and being alive in the belly of that fish. Oh, no. The greatest miracle was the transformation of Nineveh. That was the greatest miracle—the miracle of grace when God forgave and when God saved.

Look, if you will, in chapter 3, verse 1: “And the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time...” Hey, did you miss God’s calling the first time? He’s not finished with you. “The word of the LORD came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee.” And, by the way, that’s the secret of revival. “So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey.” It took three days just to walk across that city. Scholars tell us it was a city of perhaps a million people, the largest city at that time on the earth. “And Jonah began to enter into the city a day’s journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.”

And, by the way, he didn’t preach just moonlight and roses. He preached what God said. It was a message of judgment. And, dear friend, you’ll never understand the message of grace till you preach the message of judgment. The healing balm of the gospel means nothing to a man until he’s been wounded by the sword of the law. He preached judgment.

“So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For the word came unto the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not? And God saw their works that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it not.”

My dear friend, that is the great miracle. It is the miracle of God’s grace where God saves and God forgives. And to people as vile and wicked as Nineveh, God says, “Your sin is forgiven. Your iniquity is taken away.” What a miracle that comes with a message.

Conclusion

Dear friends, the Ninevites repented at the preaching of Jonah. Now let me ask you this question: If those people repented at the preaching of Jonah, and all that Jonah had was just shadows and types and a message of judgment, how much more will this generation repent at the preaching of Jesus, or should they repent at the preaching of Jesus; I mean, when we live this side of Calvary, this side of the empty tomb? Jesus said they repented at the preaching of Jonah and they were saved. Now listen to the logic of Jesus. Jesus said, “Therefore, the men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment and condemn this generation if they don’t believe, because a greater than Jonah is here.” Who’s greater than Jonah? Jesus, Jesus. What are you going to do, my dear friend, who sit in this beautiful sanctuary today, or those of you who listen in the comfort of your home on television, by the miracle of television, and you hear the word of God and you’ve got so much light, and you don’t repent? Jesus said the men of Nineveh are going to rise up in the judgment and condemn you. Do you know Jesus? Are you saved? Again, the greatest miracle is the miracle that happened to me as a teenage boy when I invited Jesus Christ into my heart and He changed me – and, bless God, is changing me, because there’s a lot of changing still needs to be done. Do you know Jesus? Are you saved? That’s the missionary miracle.