
JONAH
Will you let God be God?

The word of the Lord came to
Jonah son of Amittai: “Go to the
great city of Nineveh and preach
against it, because its wickedness
has come up before me.”
But Jonah ran away from the
Lord and headed for Tarshish.

- Jonah 1:1-3a -

JONAH

Satirical comedy is probably low on your list of things to read in the Bible, but the book of Jonah is full of it! The ship “thinks”, the cows “repent”, and the fish is literally sick of Jonah. While there are plenty of laughs, we’re also confronted with the sobering reality of our hardness of heart. You see, the book of Jonah is really about God’s desire to save Jonah. Yes, you read that right - God wants to save Jonah from his pride.

It all starts with God calling Jonah to go to big, bad Nineveh and call them to repent of their wicked ways. But Jonah goes in the opposite direction, hopping on a ship to flee from God! So God sends a storm, and Jonah is found out as the cause when he confesses that he worships the God who made the land and the sea (oh, the irony!). The sailors cry out to God for mercy as they throw Jonah overboard, and the storm stops.

Jonah thinks he’s as good as dead, sinking to the bottom of the ocean. But God saves him by sending a fish to swallow him. From the belly of the fish, Jonah prays. It’s not a prayer of repentance, though, but a self-righteous dirge. Compare Jonah 2 with Psalm 51 and the difference is astounding! Then, three days later, the fish (gratefully?) vomits Jonah onto the shore.

In chapter 3, Jonah goes to Nineveh. And despite preaching the worst sermon in history, all of Nineveh repents (including the cows!). So God relents from destroying the city, and they are saved! But Jonah is not happy, and in chapter 4 we find out why. Jonah knew that God would forgive Nineveh if they repented. That’s why he ran away, preached a terrible sermon, and then sat in disgust waiting for the city’s destruction. Jonah could not live in a world where God forgave his enemies.

Yet there is hope for Jonah, and for us too. While Jonah complains about a dead plant, God asks, “shouldn’t I have compassion on a city full of people and animals?”. If we know that God is “slow to anger and full of compassion”, will we harden our hearts toward our enemies like Jonah? Or will we let God be God?

In Christ,
Rev’d Matt Skelton
Stanthorpe Anglican Church



Warming up:
Imagine we are at war. Now imagine God has sent you to the enemy capital to preach about repentance and God's forgiveness. What are you going to do?

Read: Jonah 1

1. Why does God choose Jonah for this task? If you're not sure, ask this question again in chapter 4.
2. Why does God send Jonah to Nineveh?
3. What does Jonah do? Are we given a reason why he does this?
4. During the storm Jonah goes into a deep sleep, but the ship "thinks" about breaking up (NIV: threatened). What is the author trying to say about Jonah?
5. When questioned about his identity, what does Jonah say? Why are the sailors terrified? (Hint: read Psalm 95 and 139)
6. What do the sailors do as they cast Jonah into the sea? Compare their attitude to Jonah's. Who is acting in faith right now?
7. Now consider what the sailors do when the sea calms. How does this compare to Jonah's actions so far? What message does this send?
8. Jonah is now cast into the sea where he will drown and die. So what does God do?
9. Since the Lord *provided* the fish, does that make the fish Jonah's punishment or salvation? Why does this matter?

Rubber hits the road:
Already in Chapter 1, we have strong hints that God wants to save Jonah from his hardness of heart (along with everyone else too!). What does this teach us about the breadth and depth of God's mercy? How does this change the way we relate to our 'enemies'?

Notes / Prayer points / etc.

Prayer

Merciful God, we thank you for your enduring mercy to us despite our hardness of heart. Wake us up from our slumber, help us to see the depth and breadth of your love for your whole creation. Expose in us our hypocrisy and blindness to your goodness, that we might become evermore like your Son our Lord who loved us to the end. Amen.



Warming up:
Can you remember a time when you had to ask someone for help because you couldn't manage on your own? How did it feel?

Read: Jonah 2

1. What stands out to you in this prayer?
2. What does Jonah do when he reaches rock bottom? What do you tend to do when life gets hard?
3. How does Jonah describe his situation, and where does he recognise God at work in it?
4. What does Jonah's prayer reveal about his faith even in the middle of his suffering? What helps you turn back to God when you feel distant from him?
5. Jonah says that when his life was ebbing away, he remembered the Lord. Why is it sometimes in our hardest moments that we become more aware of our need for God?
6. In v.9, what does Jonah promise God? What do you think Jonah has learnt about God through this experience?
7. Jonah declares, "salvation comes from the Lord". What does Jonah's statement teach us about God's grace? How does this challenge our desire to be in control?
8. What have you learnt from Jonah's prayer and experience so far?

Rubber hits the road:
Jonah's prayer reminds us that even when we run from God, we can still cry out to him. Is there an area of your life where you are resisting God's will, trying to stay in control, or relying on something other than God? What would it look like this week to surrender that area to God and trust in God's grace?

Notes / Prayer points / etc.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that we can call out to you, even when we have run from you. Forgive us for the times we resist your will, try to take control, or put our trust in things other than you. Help us to recognise our need for your grace and to trust you in every part of our lives. Give us hearts that are willing to listen, obey and allow you to be God. Through Jesus Christ your son, our Lord. Amen.



Warming up:
Have you ever had to give a hard message to someone? How did it go? How did it feel? Did it land with them the way you hoped it would?

Read: Jonah 3

1. Where is Jonah now? What is God's instruction to him and how does Jonah respond?
2. How is Nineveh described in the passage?
3. In v.4, where does Jonah go and what does he proclaim?
4. Do you think Jonah was happy to preach this message? Why?
5. How do the Ninevites respond? Is this surprising? Why / why not?
6. What does the king do when he hears Jonah's warning? How is this different to other kings we meet in the Bible?
7. How would you summarise the king's proclamation?
8. In chapter 1, God asked Jonah to go to Nineveh and preach against it because of their wickedness. From vv.8-9, what do the Ninevites seem to recognise about their behaviour and their need for God?
9. What is the king hopeful for in v.9?
10. How do we see repentance and changed behaviour connected in the Ninevites' response to God? Why do you think the king specifically calls them to turn from their violence?
11. How does God respond to the people of Nineveh in v.10? What does this reveal about God's character? Is this surprising?

Rubber hits the road:
Nineveh was a wicked city, yet God sent Jonah to warn its people rather than simply abandoning them. Their response reminds us that people we might consider unlikely to turn to God can still respond to his word. Are there people or groups of people you find it difficult to imagine turning to God? How might this passage challenge the way you think about them, pray for them, or share the good news of Jesus with them?

Notes / Prayer points / etc.

Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that you are a God who speaks to us, calls us to turn from our sin, and delights to show mercy. Give us humble hearts that are willing to hear your word and respond in genuine repentance. Help us to turn away from what you say is wrong, and to live in ways that reflect your goodness, justice and compassion. Give us your heart for those who don't yet know you, and help us to never underestimate your power to change lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Warming up:
What things in your life make you angry? How might someone tell that you're feeling angry? What are some helpful ways to deal with anger?

Read: Jonah 4

1. In this passage God asks Jonah a lot of questions. Why do you think this is so?
2. Why do you think Jonah is angry? (Hint: see Jonah 3 and Jonah 4:1-3)
3. What did Jonah want to happen to the people of Ninevah? Are there still people like this around today?
4. What do vv.2-3 tell us about God? What do they tell us about Jonah?
5. Why does Jonah go out and make a tent for himself to the East of the city?
6. Why does God provide a plant in v.6? What happens to the plant?
7. How many times does Jonah say that he wants to die in this passage? What does this tell us about Jonah?
8. What point is God making for Jonah in vv.10-11? What point is he making for us?
9. How can we better care for people who are struggling with feelings of anger and depression in our community? What does this passage show us about the way God cares?

Rubber hits the road:
Write down a list of your priorities in life. Reflect on what the book of Jonah, as a whole, tells us about God and write down a list of things God prioritises. Compare and contrast the two lists and pray about them. Where are the blind spots in your life? Ask the Holy Spirit to help you order your priorities in life to reflect God's priorities.

Notes / Prayer points / etc.

Prayer

Majesty of heaven, ever living God. Thank you that you are gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and rich in love. Forgive me for letting my own agendas and passions come before your mission and priorities. Holy Spirit, help me with self-control and make me passionate about what you are passionate about. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

But the Lord said, “You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left—and also many animals?”

- Jonah 4:10-11 -

HOLY SPIRIT
ALGESTER

HOLY TRINITY
KAWANA

GLADSTONE
ANGLICAN CHURCH

stanthorpe
ANGLICAN CHURCH