

Sermon to the saints of God which are at Topeka – Sunday, Feb. 12, 2017

But he answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas: – Matt. 12:39

The 'sign of the prophet Jonas' (Jonah) is specifically spoken of by the Lord Jesus Christ as the only 'sign' that an evil and adulterous generation will be given. Jonah is the only 'minor prophet' ever to be mentioned in the 'red letter words' of Jesus Christ. He is also the only Old Testament figure that Christ Himself likens unto Himself (Matthew 12:39-41; 16:4; Luke 11:29-32). The whole book of Jonah contains only 48 verses in total, spread out over four chapters. and tells, in general, a seemingly straightforward story of a preaching mission. But man, there's a couple of real curveballs in there for us, that without light from the Lord, we would just pass right by (as is, I expect, the standard practice of most 'hearers' of the Word – they get stuck on the whale imagery that's plastered all over their religious children's toys down at the Christian bookstore). During the next two Sundays, Lord willing, we will examine the book of Jonah, with a hopeful eye toward further illumination on this only 'sign' an evil and adulterous generation will be given, as well as an examination of what we can learn of overcoming this vile flesh in the midst of our own great spiritual commission. While unpacking the whole book, verse by blessed verse, is greatly illuminating – it is also a lengthy process. I would like to frame this by reading together the book of Jonah, as a refresher for those of you who haven't been there in a while and as setting the stage for those of you who might not have good familiarity, and then I'd like to revisit certain stopping points to lay some groundwork - so that we can hopefully get to a few key conclusions next Sunday. If, along the way, any holes are left as to your general understanding in this book, just ask - I'd be pleased to speak to any of you at any time.

Ch. 1 - Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. 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, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. So the shipmaster came to him, and said unto him, What meanest thou, O sleeper? arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not. And they said every one to his fellow, Come, and let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this evil is upon us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah. Then said they unto him, Tell us, we pray thee, for whose cause this evil is upon us; What is thine occupation? and whence comest thou? what is thy country? and of what people

art thou? And he said unto them, I am an Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, which hath made the sea and the dry land. Then were the men exceedingly afraid, and said unto him, Why hast thou done this? For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. Then said they unto him, 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. – Jon. 1:1-17

Ch. 2 - Then Jonah prayed unto the LORD his God out of the fish's belly, and said, I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it vomited out Jonah upon the dry land. – Jon. 2:1-10

Ch. 3 - And 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. 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. 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. 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 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 any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: but let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, 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 that he would do unto them; and he did it not. Jon. 3:1-10

Ch. 4 - But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, 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. 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, and sat under it in the shadow, till he might see what would become of the city. And the LORD God prepared a gourd, 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. But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd that it withered. And it came to pass, when the sun did arise, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and wished in himself to die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. And God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, 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: 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? – Jon. 4:1-11

Thank you for taking the time with me to read this together. I think it will help some who are less familiar or who may not have been here in a while. Now back to the beginning for some groundwork.

Now the word of the LORD came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, - Jonah 1:1

The only 2 times that Amittai is mentioned in the Bible is here and in 2 Kings 14:25:

He restored the coast of Israel from the entering of Hamath unto the sea of the plain, according to the word of the LORD God of Israel, which he spake by the hand of his servant Jonah, the son of Amittai, the prophet, which was of Gathhepher. - 2Ki 14:25

The 'he' there is Jeroboam II, king of Israel from 789-748 BC (not the Jeroboam who was given the 10 northern tribes by the Lord God at the cleaving of Israel into a divided kingdom at the end of Solomon's reign, and who summarily put up golden calves at Dan and Bethel to facilitate false worship and idolatry as an evil, godless mechanism to save his throne – and who therefore earned eternal infamy and shame as he who 'made Israel to sin').

Both times Amittai is mentioned, it is only in terms of Jonah being the son of Amittai.

The Hebrew word Amittai means: true, faithful, (God) fearing – By God letting us know that Jonah was the son of Amittai, my sense is that He is telling us more than just Jonah's dad's name. What the name means is always part of the import – and as Amittai and Jonah are also mentioned in 2Kings, as having come from Gathhepher, we see further pregnancy in meaning (the name 'Jonah,' btw, means 'dove').

Gathhepher was on the border, or boundary, of the tribe of Zebulun – in lower Galilee (about 5 miles from Nazareth). It is no small matter that Jonah dwelling and growing up in Galilee directly refutes a purposefully contradictory notion of the Jewish leadership during Christ's ministry prior to His death, burial and resurrection, that no prophet came out of Galilee:

In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. (But this spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive: for the Holy Ghost was not yet given; because that Jesus was not yet glorified.) Many of the people therefore, when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David, and out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was? So there was a division among the people because of him. And some of them would have taken him; but no man laid hands on him. Then came the officers to the chief priests and Pharisees; and they said unto them, Why have ye not brought him? The officers answered, Never man spake like this man. Then answered them the Pharisees, Are ye also deceived? Have any of the rulers or of the Pharisees believed on him? But this people who knoweth not the law are cursed. Nicodemus saith unto them, (he that came to Jesus by night, being one of them,) doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? THEY ANSWERED AND SAID UNTO HIM, ART THOU ALSO OF GALILEE? SEARCH, AND LOOK: FOR OUT OF GALILEE ARISETH NO PROPHET. And every man went unto his own house. – John 7:37-53

Jonah was from Galilee – Galilee was a region of Israel that contained many cities – consider the scripture:

(Now Hiram the king of Tyre had furnished Solomon with cedar trees and fir trees, and with gold, according to all his desire,) that then king Solomon gave Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. - 1Ki 9:11

On the next to last page of the outline, you can get an idea of where everything is. Nazareth (where Jesus was raised) and Gathhepher (where Jonah was raised) were both in the land of Galilee – within 5 miles of each other. The Jews clearly knew this. The leaders of the Jews also plainly knew, not only of the prophesying of Jonah, but of Isaiah, who prophesied of the Messiah as coming out of Galilee:

Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined. – Isa. 9:1-2

The so-called religious leadership of the Jews – ministers of Satan, all – knew all this. And this prophesy is repeated and the fulfillment of it is pointed to in New Testament scripture:

Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; the people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. – Matt. 4:12-16

This is not only a Messianic prophesy, it is also a metaphor for the character of all the people of God before conversion, who are in a state of darkness, under the power of sin, shut up in unbelief. They are in gross ignorance of: themselves, and their condition; of sin, and the danger they are exposed to by it; of divine and spiritual things; of the grace of God; of the way of peace, life, and salvation by Christ; and of the work of the blessed Spirit; and of the truths of the Gospel – even Christ himself, who conversed among the Galilaeans, preached unto them, and caused the light of his glorious Gospel to shine into many of their hearts; by which their darkness was removed, so that they not only saw Christ, this great light, with their bodily eyes, but with the eyes of their understanding; who may be called "great light," because he is the author and giver of all light, even of nature, grace, and glory.

Galilee might be rightly called “the land of the shadow of death”, because it was a poor, miserable, and uncomfortable place, from whence no good came; and this state of being fitly

describes God's people in a natural and unregenerate state - who are dead in Adam, dead in law, dead in trespasses and sins and dead as to the capacity to spiritually reason in their souls; they have no spiritual life in them, nor any spiritual sense, feeling, or motion; they 'dwell', or continue in that state, unless the Lord does a work of grace upon their hearts.

***I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness.
– John 12:46***

Galilee, in general, and Nazareth in particular, was widely thought of as 'the wrong side of the tracks', or a place of great tumult over time, but had great significance as to prophetic wisdom and as an apt metaphor for prevailing unregeneracy without grace. Consider the scripture:

The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me. Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter. Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph. And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth (a city of Galilee)? Philip saith unto him, Come and see. Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before that Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered and saith unto him, Rabbi, thou art the Son of God; thou art the King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man. – John 1:43-51

Any of this, on its own, may not connect many dots for you – but the point I put forth in this dissection of Jonah's first verse is – and any young people especially, hear this: there is no piece of scripture, no matter how small, that is not pregnant with meaning. Meaning for us. It is the revealed word of God. Every word of this blessed book, this revealed will of God, was perfectly and providentially thought, penned and willed by God Almighty. There are no 'throw away' verses, clauses, phrases or words. Our failure to see does not mean that the meaning is not there. We must diligently seek the scriptures, call on the Lord for light and not speak in a dispositive manner beyond what he shows us with clarity. Then repeat that process - often.

Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me. – Jonah 1:2

Nineveh was capital city of the Assyrian Empire, situated in what is now northern Iraq. Its western city limit was the Tigris river – across that river is what is now the Iraqi city we hear so often in the news these days – Mosul. The Ninevites were a hard and idolatrous people – renowned for their polytheistic religion ‘Ashurism’ (similar in structure to the ancient Egyptians and both Greco-Roman and Norse mythology), their prowess and bloodthirstiness as warriors, and were feared, at the time of Jonah’s commission, by all the nations round about. The Assyrians were, in fact, an instrument that the Lord used to punish nations that forgot Him (though they, themselves, were destroyed in their pride – thinking themselves to have won battles and conquered nations in their own strength, and failing to realize or admit that the Lord is the only true conqueror and deliverer). Consider the scripture:

O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few. For he saith, Are not my princes altogether kings? Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I am prudent: and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man: and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people: and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved the wing, or opened the mouth, or peeped. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it? as if the rod should shake itself against them that lift it up, or as if the staff should lift up itself, as if it were no wood. Therefore shall the Lord, the Lord of hosts, send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory he shall kindle a burning like the burning of a fire. And the light of Israel shall be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame: and it shall burn and devour his thorns and his briers in one day; and shall consume the glory of his forest, and of his fruitful field, both soul and body: and they shall be as when a standardbearer fainteth. And the rest of the trees of his forest shall be few, that a child may write them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall

stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth. The remnant shall return, even the remnant of Jacob, unto the mighty God. For though thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant of them shall return: the consumption decreed shall overflow with righteousness. For the Lord GOD of hosts shall make a consumption, even determined, in the midst of all the land. – Isa. 10:5-23

We see this as not only a description of the arrogance and pride of the Assyrians (and their leadership), and the Lord using them as His rod, but also as a type of the calling out and sealing of the remnant of elect Jews and the utter destruction of all the rest. Back to Jonah.

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. – Jonah 1:3

Sometimes Tarshish is put for the whole of the Mediterranean sea:

Thou breakest the ships of Tarshish with an east wind. - Ps. 48:7

The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents: the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts. (Tarshish, as an individual place, would not have plural kings – but it is believed that the whole of the Mediterranean region was meant here). - Ps 72:10

Other times, it seems that Tarshish is being referred to as a specific place – a port city:

For the king's ships went to Tarshish with the servants of Hiram: every three years once came the ships of Tarshish bringing gold, and silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. - 2Ch 9:21

In this instance, the whole of the Mediterranean is not meant – it is the place, or port city of Tarshish (in the south of Spain), or the last stop on a westward voyage across the Mediterranean (which was taken very routinely by merchant seamen). If we look at a map of the region during that time (last page of sermon outline), we see physical evidence of a grand and sorrowful heart matter that sneaks past us if we don't consider the pregnancy of each of these blessed words of God, and the physical locations being written of. If you look at the map of the region at that time (back page of sermon outline, you can see that not only was Jonah trying to get somewhere other than where he was supposed to go – he was trying to get to the OTHER SIDE OF THE WORLD (as he knew it) from where he was supposed to go!

That phrase '*from the presence of the Lord*' means literally 'from being before the Lord.' Jonah knew well that man could not escape from the actual presence of God, whom he knew as the Self-existing One, He who alone IS, the Maker of heaven, earth and sea. He did not 'flee' then

‘from His presence’ (as in physically removing himself from God’s all-seeing eye or all-knowing mind) knowing well what the Holy Spirit, through king David, said:

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. – Ps. 139:7-10

Jonah fled, not from God’s presence, but from ‘standing before him’, as His servant and minister. At this moment, he refused God’s service. The burning question is, why? Much later on in the account of Jonah, he gives God a reason, of sorts, as to why he fled (and a reason for his anger at the way things had come to pass). We will get to that down the line a bit, and stay there for a minute.

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, and cast forth the wares that were in the ship into the sea, to lighten it of them. But Jonah was gone down into the sides of the ship; and he lay, and was fast asleep. -Jonah 1:4-5

This is serious business! If they were casting the wares out (the main, or only, reason for the voyage), and thereby deeply impacting all their wallets, then the straits would have indeed been dire. And they abandoned their skill as mariners, knowing that there was no seafaring maneuver that could remove them from their current peril and called out to all the differing ‘gods’ of their various religious systems (the mariners probably coming from all parts of the Mediterranean region). And then there is Jonah – asleep. I have somewhat of a scanning, cataloguing, Rolodexing mind, at least upon first consideration of a thing. I think some of you can relate – and so when I read that, my mind can’t help but go to a passage that describes a somewhat similar scene:

And the same day, when the even was come, he saith unto them, Let us pass over unto the other side. And when they had sent away the multitude, they took him even as he was in the ship. And there were also with him other little ships. And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him? – Mark 4:35-41

This isn't that.

By sleeping, Jonah was either: 1) relieved, foolishly thinking that he had successfully escaped what the Lord had bid him do, or 2) greatly grieved to the point of overload. Sometimes people of certain personality types will want to, and try to, go to sleep when a personally overwhelming, grievous situation is upon their mind and heart (I wish I could do that sometimes – but that's not how I do). Oftentimes it is being overwhelmed by thoughts of our own sin and shame, and other times it is being worn out by our own foolish, proud, self-rationalizing of our sin. In either event, sleep comes – by that mental fatigue, as a means, albeit temporary, of mental escape and shutdown.

After the shipmaster finds out that Jonah is running away from his obedience to God's commandment, he is summarily thrown overboard, that the lives of the others may be saved at the calming of the sea – and seemingly immediately, Jonah finds himself in the belly of the great fish that the Lord had prepared. This is where the sign, spoken of by the Lord Jesus Christ, begins. And where we will leave off for today. Having read the book together, all at once, and having laid some of the groundwork, my hope is to shed some light on the following questions next Sunday:

1. Why, really, did Jonah initially disobey God and try to avoid the work that he had been commanded to do?
2. What does it mean that "God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not"?
3. Why was Jonah angry at the Lord at the repenting of the Ninevites?
4. Why did Jonah sit afar off, looking down upon the city, after they had repented of their evil?
5. What is up with the gourd and the worm?
6. What can we learn from Jonah, as ambassadors of Christ who are given a very similar commission to his?
7. What really is the 'sign of the prophet Jonas' that Christ spoke of giving to an evil and adulterous generation, and what are we supposed to do with that understanding?

I am so sorry for my many offenses toward each one of you, and I love you all. Amen.

JONAH LOCATION MAP

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