

Reigning Grace and the book of . . .

Jonah

“God
Pours
Through
Broken
Pottery”

Readings from
the book of
Jonah



“God Pours Through Broken Pottery”

Readings from the Book of Jonah

Copyright © 2007 Patrick J. Griffiths
Published by Torn Veil Publications

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God Pours Through Broken Pottery

Readings from the Book of Jonah

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Prologue

Jonah is the story of a flawed individual. He is not only a rebel, but rebellious. Although his rebellion defines him in the narrative, Jonah is a prophet of God who loves His Lord and the Lord's people. It is his misreading of God's desire for the nation and nations that leads him to an untenable position of zealous patriotism and ethnic bigotry. God's desire for the nations will not be quenched by the rebellion of His own. God does and will triumph.

The story of Jonah shows how God does and continues to pour His redemptive purpose through flawed and broken pottery. The apostle Paul speaks of this same truth in 2 Corinthians 4:6-12.

⁵ For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. ⁷ But **we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves;** ⁸ we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; ⁹ persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; ¹⁰ always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹ For we who live are constantly being delivered over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹² So death works in us, but life in you.

The story of Jonah, like all biblical stories, tells this singular

idea, “We have this treasure [Christ in you, the hope of glory - Col. 1:27] in earthen vessels [vessels that are flawed and broken], with the goal that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”

Jonah could not take “credit” for Nineveh’s revival. It happened because God is “a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness”, and one who relents concerning calamity (Jonah 4:2). This truth has been sustained and testified by myriads of myriads and is no less applicable today as then. Let us blow the dust off the stagnated recesses of our souls and seek Him who loves lost sinners and employs broken saints.

An Introduction

Have you ever been asked to do something that you did not wish to do? The demands placed on you were of little personal consequence as it relates to creaturely comforts, yet it simply did not set well with you. All too often we find ourselves like the son when asked to obey answers with "I will, sir" but in the end does not his father's bidding (Matt. 21:28-32). Or perhaps we find ourselves like Peter who speaks earnest oaths of obedience only to find ourselves sitting with the enemies of our Lord denying Him with curses (Matt. 26:34, 35, 75). Jonah's disobedience is laid bare before an innumerable host of readers. Some are sympathetic and others join with the mockers of misdeeds.

Jonah's transparency is evident. The story of Jonah is an autobiography. The words flowed from a heart broken but restored. Jonah had tasted the bitter dregs of his own rebellion and the sweet nectar of God's life-giving grace. Jonah tells his own story . . . a story written in his own tears. Tears of sorrow, tears of repentance . . . and tears of joy.

As we read this glistening star against the backdrop of black rebellion, let us not forget to see Jonah as his own judge, juror, and executioner. He has tasted the metallic residue of sin's swift sword. But he also has looked into the very eyes of God as He leans forward to restore His child. As we consider the book of Jonah, I believe we would profit from some historical background.

First, Jonah was a native of Gath-hepher. He lived in the reign of Jeroboam II (790-749), and helped to recover some of Israel's lost territory (2 Kings 14:25). Jeroboam was a wicked king and set the ten Northern Tribes on a projectile of spiritual demise.

The events of this story occurred during the reign of Jeroboam II (793 BC - 753 BC) with Jonah recording it soon after. Jonah was a contemporary of both Hosea and Amos (cf. Hosea 1:1; Amos 1:1). Jonah, like many before him, was a famous statesman and prophet.

Second, He was the only Old Testament prophet to attempt to run from God. The Bible never covers up the sins of its greatest people. The list is as long as the people noted: Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, Solomon, Elijah, and now Jonah. It is only as we see them in their humanity that we see God in His deity.

Third, Jonah was one of four Old Testament prophets whose ministries were referred to by Christ (cf. Matt. 12:41; Luke 11:32). The others were Elijah (Matt. 17:11-12), Elisha (Luke 4:27), and Isaiah (Matt. 15:7). The Old Testament narrative proclaims the purpose of God in the person of Christ. We would miss much if we overlook the Christological significance of this “small” work.

Fourth, Jonah was commissioned to inform Nineveh (the chief city of Assyria) of God's coming judgment upon them. The book of Jonah records how God “encouraged” Jonah to obey that commission and the circumstances surrounding the way in which it was carried out. God works all things out for His glory and the ultimate good of His people. God works in and through the will of mankind to accomplish His purpose. This much is indisputable from the book of Jonah.

Finally, Jonah was written to demonstrate that God is merciful to all people and that His children must be controlled by a biblical view of God rather than a self-originating view. The main purpose of the book is to teach Israelites that God loves

nations other than their own — or, in fact, to teach us that He loves nations other than our own. God's vision for the nations far exceeds whatever sentimentalism we might conjure up to appease our own apathy as it relates to every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. The compassion of God for all people, even Israel's enemies, is at the heart of the book.

So as we work through the book of Jonah we would do well to remember the larger context and make sure we understand each thought inside of the consistent movement of the book itself.

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“But Jonah Rose Up To Flee . . . from the Presence of the LORD”



“But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD” (Jonah 1:3).

Read Jonah 1:1-3

The story of Jonah is one of tremendous contrasts. On one hand is God who seeks to rescue and deliver, and on the other sits the prophet Jonah whose patriotism and national bias blind him to a window of enormous proportions for national deliverance.

The text tells us the word of the LORD came to Jonah. Somehow God communicated to Jonah His word. This word was direct and unmistakable. There was no capacity to be misunderstood. God spoke to Jonah. The intent or design behind the revelation of God is to reveal. God spoke in such a way as to be understood. His language is not cryptic or coded. It is clear and concise, straight and immediate, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and cry against it, for their wickedness has come up before Me.”

In the face of this direct communication the prophet had but two options before him. He could either obey or disobey. There really was no middle ground. On one hand the response was unfortunate, “But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.” Yet there is a flip side to Jonah’s disobedience. It is through his disobedience

we see the sheer enormity of God's grace to Jonah and to the people of Nineveh. His response is not good and in fact it is sin, but God works the activities of the wicked will as a part of His eternal purpose (Prov. 16:4). No one and nothing can or will thwart God from fulfilling His purpose for the nations.

The sinful choices we make will always cost us more than we are willing to pay, keep us longer than we wish to stay, and take us farther than we desire to go. This is openly seen in the poor path of Jonah's digression, "So he went down to Joppa, found a ship which was going to Tarshish, paid the fare and went down into it to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD."

The sinful choices we make will always cost us more than we are willing to pay, keep us longer than we wish to stay, and take us farther than we desire to go.

The consequences of Jonah's choice will become clear to himself and to those around him. Yet before we move to the next paragraph of the story, perhaps we can ask ourselves the question, "Why am I here and how did I get there?" All

choices have consequences. God still speaks to His people, and like Jonah each of us has a choice to make. We can either choose obedience or we can choose disobedience. Yet either way a choice will be made. Each choice has an intrinsic value. Good choices typically have positive consequences whereas bad choices for the most part have negative consequences. God would have us choose the good, but let us not deceive ourselves into thinking that God sits in bondage to our buffoonery. God is working out His will in and through our poor choices for the magnification of His glorious activity.

So as you sit contemplating the place of internment, think hard on God and what He would have you to do and then seek to bend your will around that of your Creator.

CHRIST IN JONAH . . .

The apostle John tells us that the Word was made flesh, that He dwelt among us, and that those to whom He came rejected Him (John 1:1-14). Jesus Christ is the Word of God. He comes to His people regularly and we have before us two simple choices. We can receive Him by faith and become a child of God (John 1:12) or reject Him as our Savior and continue in darkness (John 1:5). If you do not know Jesus Christ as the Word of God for the salvation of your eternal soul, then please consider receiving Him by faith today. If you know Jesus Christ as your Savior, then listen to His voice. He is always speaking. Are you listening?

2

“How Is It That You Are Sleeping?”

*“So the captain approached him and said,
'How is it that you are sleeping?
Get up, call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned
about us so that we will not perish'” (Jonah 1:6).*

Read Jonah 1:4-10

Jonah’s indifference in the face of insurmountable opposition is noteworthy, perhaps incredulous. The storm that raged outside was a simple picture of what was going on in the heart of Jonah. The intensity of the storm was such that the ship itself was on the verge of breaking up (v. 4). Its strength frightened even the sailors (v. 5). Perhaps it was ancient superstition that attributed the storm’s source to wrong doing or crossed deities. Regardless, they saw it as consequential and thus sought out its cause.

In the middle of this tumultuous context the Bible says that “Jonah had gone below into the hold of the ship, lain down and fallen sound asleep.” What? Chaos rules the day and Jonah dismisses it and falls sound asleep. How could Jonah fall sound asleep in the middle of a storm’s passionate

Because of Jonah's God-centered world view he was able to sleep in the storm.

release? Jonah slept the sleep of sin’s exhaustion. The way of the transgressor is hard (Prov. 13:15) and there is no God-given peace for the wicked (Isa. 48:22; Rom. 3:17). He slept because he knew the God of the storm. Although he stood in a position of open rebellion, his confidence in God’s control could not be so easily shaken. Nothing would happen to Jonah that God was not

permitting to happen. Because of Jonah's God-centered worldview he was able to sleep in the storm.

The sailors however did not share Jonah's settled confidence in the sovereignty of God. They quickly assessed the situation and sought Jonah out. Through a simple game of lot casting, Jonah's plight became known to the crew (v. 7) [c.f. Prov. 16:33].

By inquiry they learned of Jonah's open mutiny and his meager attempt of fleeing from the "LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land" (v. 9). The response of the sailors stands in contrast to that of Jonah. They were extremely frightened while Jonah slept soundly (v. 10). Jonah openly shared his attempt of trying to flee from presence. Where could Jonah go that God did not know or was not already there? Was he brash or indifferent? Was he downcast or openly arrogant? We do not know. We do know that Jonah did not hide his sinful choices.

Our foolish choices cause us to act irrational and ridiculous. Our sinful choices have uncontrollable consequences both to ourselves and to those around us. Jonah found himself in a situation that had no where to go but to God. Perhaps today we are sleeping soundly while the storms of our sinful choices rage around us. Perhaps today it is time for us to wake up and face God for the first time.

CHRIST IN JONAH . . .

The contrast between our Lord sleeping in the storm in a boat and that of Jonah can be noted in passing (Mark 4:35-41). Those whose confidence rests in God can find comfort in life's storms.

3 “Man Overboard!”

“So they picked up Jonah, threw him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging” (Jonah 1:15).

Read Jonah 1:11-17

Jonah’s sinful choices caused immediate consequences to those around him. His “riding” companions were becoming more alarmed as the sea was becoming increasingly stormy (v. 11).

Jonah accepted full responsibility for his sinful choices and understood the consequences of them. For whatever reason, he understood that his personal “sacrifice” of being thrown overboard would rectify the situation (v. 12). His companions did not desire to comply with what would appear to be an unreasonable solution to the problem, thus they sought another way (v. 13).

It is only when we confront our sin as God sees it that we can find calm in the storm.

This is how we often face the solution to our problems. We seek a way that is inconsistent with the purpose of God. The solution to sin is a putting off process (Eph. 4:21). The idea is one of repentance. Sin’s solution recognizes the rightness of God and the wrongness of man. There is no other way to rectify open rebellion. It is only when we confront our sin as God sees it that we can find calm in the storm.

Their good intentions were met with divine resistance. The sea was becoming even stormier against them. In complete frustration the sailors prayed their prayer of illumination,

“We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, O LORD, have done as You have pleased” (v. 14). In good faith they follow through by throwing Jonah into the sea (v. 15). Instantaneously the sea stopped its raging. The sea takes on a life of its own as if Jonah's rebellion against God was a personal affront to the sea itself. All of creation pays a divine dividend and stands as an open witness against the rebellion of man in opposition to the ownership of God (Rom. 8:22).

Their anxious obedience expresses itself through a sacrifice to the LORD and the making of vows (v. 16). They quaked for some time afterwards. Their eyes skirted back and forth while their fingers fidgeted with the various ropes and wooden stops. Individual calm would only come with time and distance.

Our thought ends with a cryptic notation, “And the LORD appointed a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish three days and three nights.”

If the story is a complete thought, then chapter one ends the first movement. If a film, then we are left with having to wait for the second installment for the conclusion to this epic tale between a rebellious citizen and an absolute monarch.

CHRIST IN JONAH . . .

It was by means of a sacrifice that wrath was satisfied. The wrath of God against the sins of the world can only be satisfied by the offering up of His spotless and infinite Son (1 John 2:1, 2). The Father did for His people what they could never do for themselves (Rom. 5:6, 8, 10).

4

“Then Jonah Prayed to the LORD”

*“Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God
from the stomach of the fish” (Jonah 2:1).*

Read Jonah 2:1-10

Jonah’s sin against God is not that of an apostate but of a rebel. Jonah’s theology concerning God is accurate. He knew who God is and what He could do. His prayer is one of desperation, but also of faith. He believed that God alone could deliver him from the stomach of the great fish (v. 1).

Jonah’s prayer first affirms his own plight being one of distress (v. 2) and in dire need of help (v. 7). He was equally certain that God would hear his voice (v. 2).

Secondly, Jonah knew why he was there and who put him there, “You had cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas” (v. 3). He also recognized that he had been cast from the sight of God although he was confident that he would be delivered and restored (vv. 4, 6).

At the LORD’S bidding creation bows without reservation or thought to His unbending will.

Inside of the great fish Jonah appears to make some grandiose vows, “But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving.

That which I have vowed, I will pay” (v. 9). Salvation is from the LORD. God is not obligated by the fox hole praying of His people. He does what He wishes with what is His. Although God does follow the normal outworking of His will through providential lines, He can suspend them as it pleases Him.

Through the working of circumstances Jonah comes to his senses and seeks deliverance by God. At the LORD'S bidding creation bows without reservation or thought to His unbending will. The LORD prepared the fish and commands the fish to both swallow and spew.

It is impossible for anyone to fathom the scope of Jonah's horror. To have existed in the belly of a great fish for three days without rest or food and then to have the same fish that swallowed you vomit you up on the shore is incomprehensible. Jonah's excitement must have been tempered by sheer exhaustion. I would have to believe his relief gave way to contemplative thought. Why am I here, and what did I do or fail to do that brought me to this place? Those questions are still a pretty good means of assessing why we are where we are and what could we have done or need to do to change our present circumstances.

CHRIST IN JONAH . . .

When the Scribes and Pharisees asked Jesus for a sign He responded by saying to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign will be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; for just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." In this short statement our Lord Jesus confirms the historicity of the event and its Christological importance. Jonah foretold the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. He preached the "gospel" beforehand. What Jonah spoke through His experience added to the weight of his words to the people of Nineveh. Can you see Christ in the message of Jonah? Perhaps today God will cause us to see the Christ of the Old Testament. May we be moved to pray for clarity.

5 “Now the Word of the LORD Came to Jonah the Second Time”

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time” (Jonah 3:1)

Read Jonah 3:1-4

The God of the second chance — only the self-deceived and righteously introverted negate the enormity of God’s far reaching grace. The feverishly delirious are blinded by their own reflection to see anything other than the God of the second chance.

“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time” . . . a second time . . . a second chance. Oh, the weight of such words to those who find themselves broken by the magnitude of their own burden. God comes to us quietly and steadily with an unfaltering step. He directs His unconditional love toward the weak and weary. He lifts those who find themselves in the “belly of the great fish.” He cleans the stench from those who have been vomited up on the shores of the second chance.

The purpose of God for the people of Nineveh steps forward without hesitation, “Arise, go to Nineveh the great city and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you” (v. 2). No creature of His will stop Him from carrying out the eternal purpose.

It is to these people, people whom He loved before the foundation of the world, His word is to come. Jonah was not

responsible for the outcome of the proclaimed word. His sole responsibility laid in proclaiming a message of simplicity. Jonah was to simply obey. "So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the LORD" (v. 3).

The message entrusted to him is captured in the sacred text with eight thin words, "Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown" (v. 4).

Yet forty days . . . there is coming a day of impending judgment in which the justice of God will be satisfied by the outworking of His undiluted wrath. Yet forty days . . . but for these forty days the judgment of God will be stayed. Yet forty days . . . and you will be able to feast at the table of God and drink from cisterns that sparkle with the pure waters of God. Yet forty days . . . and the gnawing emptiness of your hunger will stand satisfied. Yet forty days . . . and you will know just how close you were to entering into the very rest of God.

God waits for you. As His child, He is for you, the God of the second chance. His arms are open to receive you without condition. As one who might not know what He has done or who He is, know this, His judgment is sure. You will no more be able to escape the judgment of God than to hide from the relentless onslaught of the descending avalanche. So today while there is still time, know this . . . God, our God, is the God of the second chance.

God, our God, is the God of the second chance.
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CHRIST IN JONAH . . .

Our Lord Jesus in Matthew's Gospel calls out to all who are weary and heavy laden (Matt. 11:28-30). He calls in order to give rest. He calls to comfort the weary. He calls to bring

hope to the downcast (Luke 4:18). He calls . . . and He waits. God is relentless in His pursuit of His people. He will never leave you nor forsake you (Matt. 28:20). All of His promises to you will be fulfilled by Him for you (2 Cor. 1:20). Never forget that God is the God of the second chance.

“Then the People of Nineveh Believed in God”



“Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them” (Jonah 3:5).

Read Jonah 3:5-10

When all hope is lost and we sit in our place of complete dejection, delirious in our loss, God whispers our name. He reaches out to us with a touch that brings hope, healing, and wholeness. His words softly cascade over our wounded souls. There is calmness in the way and in what is said. The damp coldness of failed expectations flees on the skirt of His gracious words.

When all hope is lost
and we sit in our place
of complete dejection,
when we are delirious
in our loss,
God whispers our name.

In Jonah’s message of judgment God brought life to the dead and light to those who lived in darkness. There is a mystery behind the events described. We know nothing more of what Jonah preached than what is contained in 3:4. Although hidden inside of his great fish experience laid the gospel proclaimed. We hear nothing of the actions of the people other than what is contained in verse 5, “Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth from the greatest to the least of them.” Even the King of Nineveh “covered himself with sackcloth and sat on the ashes” (v. 6). The degree to which he took to heart the message of the prophet can be seen to the degree in which he carried out the fast against all animated objects (vv. 7, 8).

His earnestness is also seen in inviting people to “call on God earnestly that each may turn from his wicked way and from the violence which is in his hands” (v. 8). Whether or not this earnest intent would bear eternal fruit was unknown to him but he was willing to risk all in order that God might “turn and relent and withdraw His burning anger so that we will not perish” (v. 9).

May the Holy Spirit sweep over our brokenness. May it please the Father to restore us in our pursuit of Him. Perhaps today God will use His word to awaken within us the condition of our souls, and perhaps today it will be said of us, “We believed in God.”

CHRIST IN JONAH . . .

Jesus Christ used the story of Nineveh’s repentance to rebuke the Pharisees and Sadducees of His day (Matt. 12:41; 16:4). Nineveh’s repentance stands as a silent witness against the cold-hearted and rebellious actions of the non-believing. Their witness will silence the outcries of injustice in the Day of Judgment. The people of Nineveh stand as sentinels to “the greater than Jonah.” Can you hear their voice and see their witness?

“Do You Have Good Reason To Be Angry?”



“The LORD said, ‘Do you have good reason to be angry?’” (Jonah 4:4).

Read Jonah 4:1-4

Here is one of those dilemmas that face the small hearted and self-deceived. What we have graciously received we desire to withhold from others. How sad and unfortunate. Jonah’s response to Nineveh’s repentance is one of great displeasure and to top it off “he became angry” (v. 1).

Jonah’s reluctance to preach repentance to a nation he hated was rooted in his understanding of who God is and how God conducts Himself. Jonah knew “that [He is] a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and one who relents concerning calamity” (v. 2).

Perhaps Jonah had already forgotten that it was because God is all this and more that He delivered him from the belly of the great fish and determined to bring him His word “a second time.” Jonah’s sin of small heartedness made him utterly irrational. He prayed a prayer that made little if no sense, “O LORD, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life” (v. 3).

I think it is helpful to remember how venomous the nation of Assyria was toward conquered nations. Assyria was the enemy that would take the ten northern tribes of Israel into captivity in 722 BC. This was only about 30 years away from Jonah’s time. Because they dispersed the people, their national identity would be lost in time. As a statesman,

Jonah had observed the growing threat against the nation and his national preservation caused him to have disdain for the Assyrian army. Perhaps a similar emotional feeling would be God calling to a Jew to preach a message of repentance in Germany during the era of the Holocaust. Perhaps it is for this reason that Jonah is displeased with their repentance, becomes angry, and desires to die.

Maybe we can take the edge off our own reaction to Jonah's response and consider the hypocrisy of our own heart response to the goodness of God toward those we consider to be unworthy of it. I believe God's response to Jonah is couched in the most empathetic language, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" (v. 4). Jonah had just experienced a very strong visual as to what God wants and how far He will go to get it. Despite the direct and forceful prodding of God, Jonah was still reluctant. God now asked him a probing question, "Do you have good reason to be angry? Well . . . do you?"

Before we cast our stones at Jonah let us examine our own responses to the goodness of God. How many times have we been upset at the good fortune of others? The question asked of Jonah is just as relevant for us today, "Do you have good reason to be angry?" It is this thought that God will drive home in our next paragraph.

CHRIST IN JONAH . . .

Jesus Christ invites us to look upon the fields as they are white to harvest (John 4:35). Often we find ourselves more concerned by the dent in our car than the walking damned all around us. We are more concerned about what people think about us than what we think about them. Our own shallowness stands as an open rebuke against the eternal

truths of God. Only God can move us to see the fields of white needing to be harvested. May it please God to raise up in our midst those who will join Him in the harvesting of His people for the glory of His name.



“So the LORD God Appointed”

“So the LORD God appointed a plant and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. And Jonah was extremely happy about the plant” (Jonah 4:6).

Read Jonah 4:5-11

The book of Jonah provides for the reader a well orchestrated event. God the planner executes His purpose flawlessly. On every front and at every turn God moves providence in seemingly insignificant ways to fulfill His purpose. In concluding the story of Jonah, God continues to hold sway over all things created. He has worked through a stormy sea, an enormous fish, and now a growing plant and a scorching east wind; seemingly insignificant things, yet each one fulfills a purpose and each one carries out the design of its Creator.

On every front and at every turn God moves providence in seemingly insignificant ways to fulfill His purpose.

Jonah has preached the message of judgment and the people of Nineveh have repented and prayed for mercy. Jonah now waits outside the city hoping to see the judgment of God fall on the enemies of Israel (v. 5). God, as the eternal and persistent teacher, appointed a plant to grow over the head of Jonah in order that he might have a moment of relief from the constant heat. This action on God’s part made Jonah “extremely happy about the plant” (v. 6). God then appointed a worm to attack the plant and kill it (v. 7). In the absence of the shading plant Jonah was fully exposed to the

persistent heat. Jonah was vulnerable. "When the sun came up God appointed a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint and begged with all his soul to die, saying, 'Death is better to me than life'" (v. 8). Jonah's discomfort was such that he prayed for death. Jonah's emotional frustration and spiritual famine accentuated his physical depletion. Again, his thinking was clouded.

God poses a question to his disgruntled prophet, "Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?" Jonah was quick to respond, "I have good reason to be angry, even to death."

The LORD sends forth His arrow of application, "[If] you had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?" (v. 11).

Zing . . . the arrow of application embeds itself deeply into the heart and mind of our reluctant messenger. The story ends. Nothing further is noted. We are confronted with our own condition. What if we were that prophet? How would we respond? We sit in our comfortable position as judge, juror, and executioner, but what would we actually have done? What thoughts would have crossed our minds? All of us wish to believe the prophet is thunderstruck by the clarity of God's point and that he finally gets it. But we are not left with any real

God appoints
and what He
appoints comes
to pass.

resolution. Perhaps it is in this way we are confronted with our own searching. May God cause us to place the significance of His redemptive purpose over our own immediate comfort. May He move us to see the salvation of people to be of greater significance than our national pride and patriotism.

CHRIST IN JONAH . . .

Just as . . . so also. God appoints and what He appoints comes to pass. The book of Acts has two very weighty statements. Both are found in sermons preached by the apostle Peter. The death Christ died in behalf of His people was predetermined and foreknown by God the Father. Listen carefully to the text of Scripture,

“this Man, delivered over by the **predetermined** plan and **foreknowledge** of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death” (Acts 2:23).

Jesus Christ died according to plan.

This same idea is present in Acts 4:27, 28.

²⁷“For truly in this city there were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ **to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur**” (Acts 4:27, 28).

Jonah tells us that God was relentless in pursuing His people according to His eternal plan. There were no manmade accidents in the book of Jonah; there were only divine appointments. The purpose of God in the book of Jonah was

carried forth flawlessly. God's hand in time simply performed His eternal purpose.

This is no less true in the life and death of Jesus Christ. He died according to plan. It is only because God appointed that you and I can find deliverance from impending judgment. Today may you see just how full the love of God is for you, and may this love ring true in your heart.

A Final Word

What an incredible work. The imprint of God shines like radiant beams through the opening of day. It dissipates the fog to reveal the glory of the risen Christ. Jonah's failure manifests the goodness of God. What we would deem loss, God calls gain. A Word comes, a prophet fails, a second chance, a preached word, judgment coming, repentance made, deliverance wrought, a lesson taught, and God bathes the weary in the power of His embrace.

The brutality of God's breaking is breathtaking. The crushing weight of His hand bends the defiant knee. It can be through the clenched fist of the rebellious or through the weakened voice of the reluctant, but God will be praised. The mutinous will of those who are His own cannot stop the advancing hand of God.

Abraham was called upon to offer up his son Isaac as a blood sacrifice. Job lost everything without knowing the outcome of the entire story. Paul's entire identity for which he labored so long to attain vanished in one moment on a road to Damascus. Everything, whether a mother or father, a son or daughter, houses, lands, wealth, popularity, power, or position was offered up on the altar of God.

Unlikely? . . . perhaps. Impossible? . . . no. God calls you where you are to deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him. The journey is not pretty, or nice, or convenient. You do not bargain with it or debate it. There is no negotiation. There is no fine print. The agreement is irrevocable. You embrace it only as it embraces you. You cannot choose it for others or even for yourself. It's there.

Jonah is an earthen vessel through which God poured out His purposes. The vessel would be one for honor or dishonor. Their dissimilarity, although noticeable, is swallowed up in one overriding constant. Through both God's purpose for creating would be carried out flawlessly.

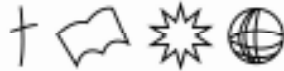
There is little left once the day settles. All has been spent. We are left wondering many things. Did Jonah repent? What did he do after this? Did God use him again? Was he married, did he have children . . . grandchildren? Was Jonah more open to the Word of the Lord, or was he persistent in his obstinacy?

Although Jonah bent to the will of God and there is little wonder as to his own battle against a vacillating will, one thing is certain, "God has an unchanging passion for the playing out of His eternal purpose in securing for His people their redemption."

Today, you might be in the crucible of God's crushing. I can tell you to embrace it, but not as one who speaks without sympathy. A multitude cries with you. They groan under the sheer weight of your burden and the crushing of your heart and hopes. But God . . . God has not left you to yourself. His promises stand. Although He slays you, trust Him. You will come forth as gold . . . He promised.

Nothing created can stop God from carrying out His will. Today as you think on your own redemption now is the time to thank Him for it. As you think of those who are yet to be saved, know this: God will accomplish His purpose for them. He will reach them and draw them unto Himself. Perhaps today God is calling you to declare the gospel in word and in deed to those who are inside your circle of influence. May this day prove to be a day of glory.

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